THE BLACK STUFF by DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

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Adventure

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HECTOR CHEVIGNY
JIM KJELGAARD
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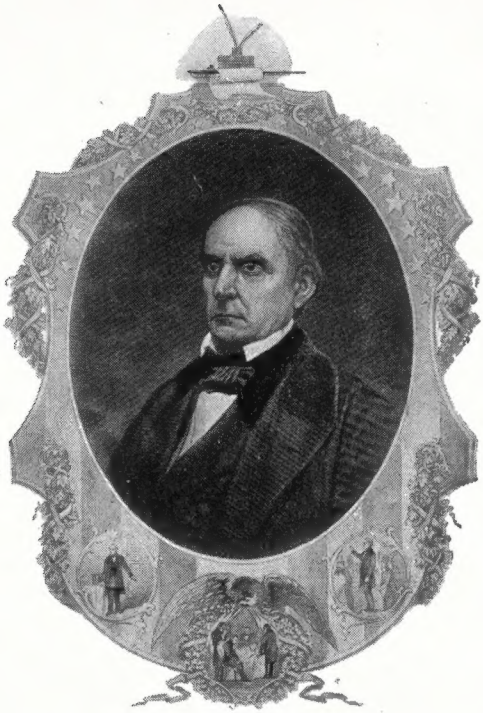
AND OTHERS



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Vol. 114, No. 2 for December, 1945 Best of New Stories

NOVELETTES

Pigeon Blood.....E. HOFFMANN PRICE 8

Burma was deloused, Mike Finlay was willing to admit, and there weren't any Jap guerrillas prowling around the Mogok ruby diggings, but every native outlaw in the district would be riding high, wide and handsome. Mike wanted no piece of it. After running a pipeline all the way from Calcutta to China, under fire most of the time, the last thing he craved was to tangle with thugs and *dacoits* over a dead man's pigeon-blood legacy that might turn out to be only a myth after all. But eighty-four thousand gates of the law were waiting to be keyed open, so, like a sucker, of course he went—to embroil himself promptly in all the trouble he'd anticipated—and more!

The Black Stuff.....DONALD BARR CHIDSEY 60

Yankee dollars, pounds sterling, bar silver of the Sycee kind in little chunks shaped like a lady's slipper—it was all one in the 1830's to the skipper of a Connecticut clipper roaring up the China Coast with chest on teakwood chest of opium—the finest Malwa kind for the rajah-trade—bulging her hold. Young Jasper Green, third mate of the *Hannah,* had few scruples about the cargo she carried. Sailoring was a fool's trade anyhow, he felt, and all he wanted was a stake in Canton and to get back to the Nutmeg State and maybe find himself a wife. Then, suddenly, what with the plague, a typhoon and pirates descending on the bark—one, two, three—he found himself saddled with a captaincy, plus a bride with a whim of iron who dowered him with scruples galore as well as the Sycee silver stake he sought.

SHORT STORIES

The Testimony of Singletrack Simpson.....HECTOR CHEVIGNY 38

Some people indulge in double-talk and some talk in circles, but there was no beating about the bush with Simpson. Singletrack's conversation hewed to the line, you might say, and Lord pity anyone who got him off the monorail of his monologue when, as the sole witness to murder, he decided to usurp the prerogative of the accused and make the trial his own personal property.

Rope's End.....RAYMOND S. SPEARS 47

When a couple of river rats go to all the trouble Pless and Redlegs did to steal a mile of handy-line you'd think they'd deserve to keep at least a foot or two of their loot. But government watchmen are a mean, forbidding, exasperating class who insist on retrieving every inch.

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BE OUT ON DECEMBER 12TH ◆ ◆ ◆

The Acing of Field Marshal Cluff..... JAMES ATLEE PHILLIPS 50
To be an ace you have to get five planes. Jimmy Cluff finally got his and in the getting became the only transport pilot alive with the legitimate rank of ace. That the aircraft were all his own explains, of course, the five neat American flags painted on the fuselage. But it doesn't explain Jimmy.

Gone Injun..... NARD JONES 54
There wasn't a better river man on the Columbia than Zeb Partridge, the Yakima breed, relief pilot for the O.S.N. Company. But his old man had taught him to dislike whites and every so often the teaching would boil out in him and he'd vanish into the hills with a jug of whiskey and his nasty temper to live with the Klickitats for a spell. It was after one of these "gone-injun" interludes that the *Dannie Loop* foundered above the Cascades landing—and Zeb got his chance, in the craft's Texas, to prove that good blood tells after all, no matter what the strain.

Charley Hoe Handle and the Reluctant Muskie..... JIM KJELGAARD 134
Even a poor angler can get a strike when there are plenty of fish around but the best fisherman in the world can't catch any when there just aren't any to catch. Unless, that is, you're the sort of super-angler Charley was. Then it doesn't matter whether there are any fish in the lake or not.

THE SERIAL

Chains for Columbus (2nd of 5 parts)..... ALFRED POWERS 108
Lord, my lord, my great lord Montezuma! Thus chanted the parrot of Pico of Hispaniola, who had sailed with the Admiral of the Ocean Sea to the fabulous new world of the Indies. But those few seemingly innocent words, intoned over and over again, caused iron shackles to be welded about the ankles of Columbus, enmeshed young Francisco Perez in the awful toils of the Inquisition, and prompted Their Majesties Ferdinand and Isabella to heed the warnings of their dearest enemy when the Great Navigator upped anchor for his fourth and final tragic voyage.

THE FACT STORY

El Gaucho..... JOHN RICHARD YOUNG 96
Like the American cowboy—his counterpart on our own Western plains—the gaucho breed lives on in fact and legend, and like his grandfathers who fought and died to be free—adept with *bolas, lazo* and *sogas*—the lean, mahogany-faced man of the pampas still herds his cattle in the traditional way until, at last, death riding even swifter than he can, catches up with him.

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Cover painted for Adventure by Ernest Chiriaka

Kenneth S. White, Editor

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

NO recruits to the ranks of our Writers' Brigade this issue so we'll ask a veteran to splinter a little kindling for the fire—and let the chips fly where they may. Donald Barr Chidsey, anent "The Black Stuff," his novelette on page 60, writes:

I don't suppose any guy ever wrote any kind of story about any kind of sailing boat or sailing vessel—and published it—without submitting some editor to a spate of see-here-that's-nonsense letters. Uh-uh. There isn't a touchier subject on earth. There isn't anything about which so many readers know so much and are dying to tell it. But only on one point in "The Black Stuff" do I anticipate more or less snarling. And I feel in the clear about this point, because for years I had it wrong myself:

A clipper is not necessarily a ship. It can be a schooner, and in fact more often than not it was. It can be, or rather could be, a bark, like the *Hannah* in the story, or a brig, or even a cutter, or a yawl. The rig has nothing to do with it, nothing at all. Even the hull, though it is much more important than the rig, hasn't much to do with it. A clipper was a fast sailing vessel—and that's about all anyone can sensibly assert.

It is granted that the great clippers, the famous ones, the clippers the artists drew, were, by and large, full-rigged ships. However, there were a lot of clippers the artists *didn't* draw. It's a matter not so much of the rake of the masts, or even of the bowsprit, as the hollowness of the bows, the drag of the stern, the dead-rise—but let's not have any more technical terms. Hell, a canoe could be a clipper if it was built a certain way—though admittedly it wouldn't be a canoe any more. The *Hannah* in the story is a clipper bark. Nothing could be more logical.

The opium trade between India and Canton did not last long, and the men engaged in it didn't talk much about it—and didn't write anything at all. The men engaged in it were just a little ashamed of it, if the truth be told. It was not quite like slaving; but still, it wasn't nice. The clippers we read about, or read most about—the clippers whose likenesses used to adorn Franklin D. Roosevelt's walls—were mostly tea clippers. Quite a different thing. Larger vessels, and nicer looking. And, yes, ships.

Come to think of it, not a few of the opium-trade clippers were ex-slavers. The *Ann,* for instance, which was a brig. Or the celebrated fast *Syed Khan,* a Baltimore clipper schooner. A few others I think of, which weren't ever in the slave trade, as far as the records show, but were certainly in the opium trade, are the brig *Lady Grant,* the schooner *Time,* the bark *Sylph,* the bark *Waterwitch,* the brig *Danube,* the schooner *Flying Fish* (later the *Spec*), the bark *Sea Witch,* the bark *Coquette,* the schooner *Ariel,* the schooner *Black Swan,* the bark *Tartar,* and the two famous Aberdeen schooners *Reindeer* and *John Bunyan.* The very first of the opium clippers, as far as we can find out, was the *Red Rover,* a bark like the *Hannah.*

It was not a ship-carrying trade, as the tea trade was. Cargo space was not notably important. What got a skipper the business, at Bombay or up the Hooghly at Calcutta, for a run to Canton with opium, was the ability to do it not only twice but often three times in a year. The ordinary East Indiaman, the country wallah, which had been carrying that trade before the appear-

(Continued on page 138)

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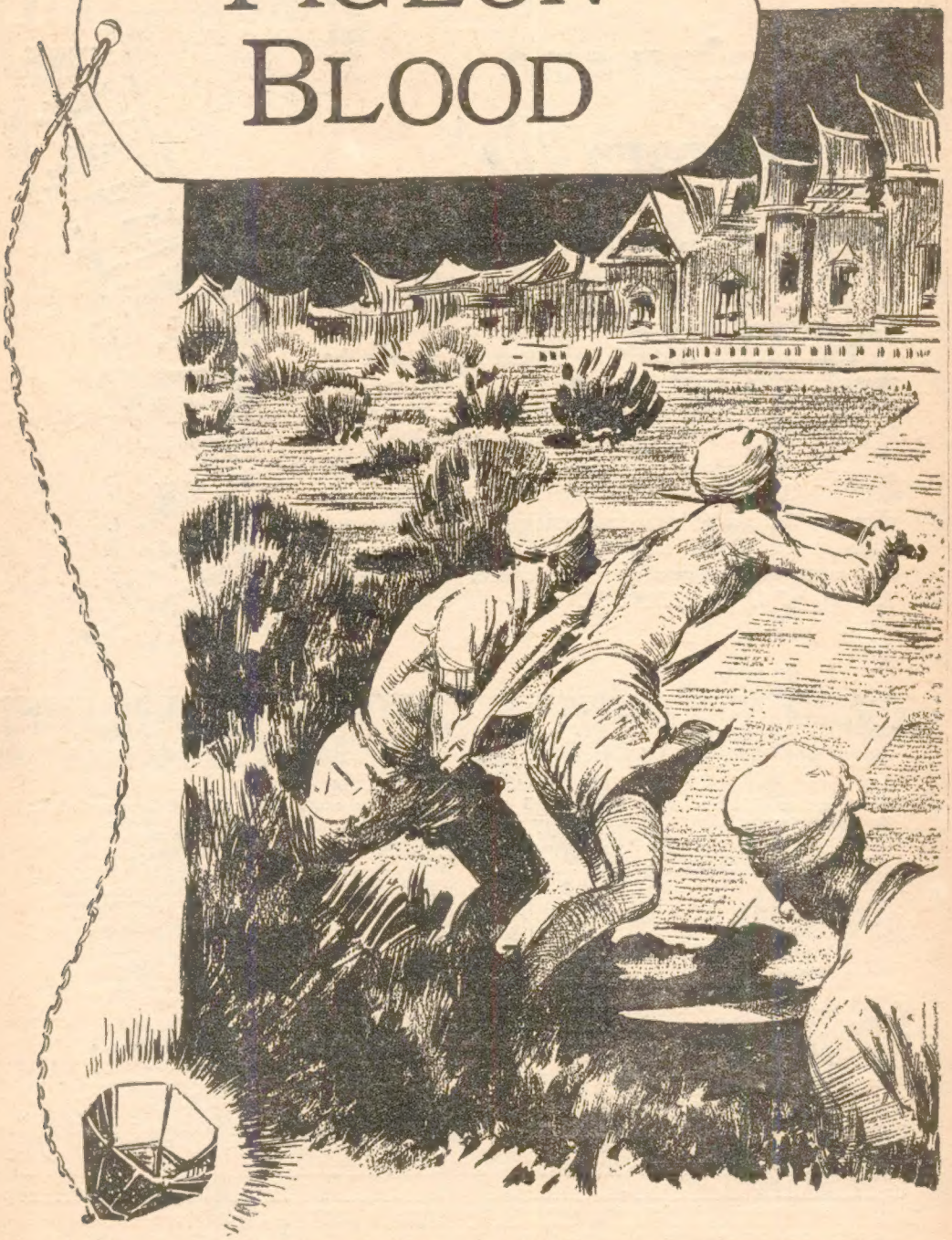


Men pounced from cover, the gleam of their blades clear and cold. . .

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK KRAMER

. . . Finlay whirled and raced across the compound toward the monastery.

HE DIDN'T limp any more, and malaria was only an unpleasant memory. Nothing bothered Mike Finlay except Nadine's idiocy.

"Beautiful Alipore," he grumbled, and ran stubby fingers inside his wilting collar. "Twelve servants to herd you around, in the lousiest climate in the world."

His white coat was crisp as a well-used dishcloth. His homely face gleamed with sweat. The chunk-thump-slap of a ceiling fan, jerked by a coolie, stirred the dripping air, but cooled nothing.

Nadine, however, looked fresh as the misted glasses which the table boy set out. "Don't be a dope, Mike. Relax."

"O. K., I'm in a lather to get back to Frisco for a beakful of chilly fog." Ferociously, he finger-combed a shock of hair. "I hoarded every rupee I earned on that pipeline job, I got a chance to go into business back home, and now you ask me, won't I go an' dig rubies for you, way to hell and gone in Burma!"

He eyed Nadine Hudson, from size-four slippers to hazel-flecked eyes. She was enough to gladden any man.

Mike Finlay went on, "Minute you hear Rangoon and Pegu are deloused, you have to go to Burma. No Jap guerrillas prowling around Mogok, but every native outlaw'll be riding high, wide, and handsome. I want none of it."

"Mike! *Please* don't try to make me believe you're nervous, after running that pipeline all the way from Calcutta to China! And under fire lots of the time."

The right touch of admiration in her voice made Finlay waver, but he got back in line. "Poking out my chin for rubies is something else. Sell the diggings, give 'em to Ghandi."

"But it's on account of Neil and Dad."

That took the starch out of Finlay. Nadine's father, and her brother, Neil Hudson, who had died during the Burma campaign, had just before the Jap invasion come within arm's reach of making their claim pay dividends. Where, after many years of using mechanized Occidental methods, Burma Mines, Ltd. had finally gone out of business, Neil Hudson and his father had tried native methods. Now Nadine wanted to carry on to win financial independence for her father's last years. Knowing all this, Mike Finlay became ashamed of his solid sense, yet, he also resented his own wavering from good judgment.

Finally he went resolute. "Another thing. Your heart throb, Sinclair, what's wrong with *him*?"

"Owen," she answered, sadly, "is as stuffy as you are." Nadine spent a moment studying the table-cut diamond on her fourth finger. She twisted it toward the knuckle, slowly turned it back into place. "You say I'm dizzy, Owen says the same. It's discouraging."

Inconsistently, Finlay began to resent Owen Sinclair's agreeing with him. But he said, "There you are. He brought you all of Neil's things from—from—"

"The Sittang front."

"All right. Romantic and all that. But now he's got his little heart set on going back to his teak empire and sawmills. I got nothing important, so I should be crazy?"

"Please, Mike. As a matter of fact, Owen did say he'd go up to Mogok—he has a teak lease up there—and look things over for me, when he could find time. I just want to get busy."

Finlay gritted his teeth. He struck his hands together, twice, and said to the Madrassi servant, "Boy! Get my hat." Then, to Nadine, "If I'd handed you a diamond the size of a doorknob, if I'd been with Neil on the Sittang, maybe I'd go to Mogok with you, but what kind of a jerk do you think I am, doing Sinclair's chores for him?"

"Then you won't help me? Not even for Neil's sake."

"Neil'd turn over in his grave if he knew you intended to head for Mogok in times like these. He ran you and your dad out in plenty time—"

"And stayed there himself, working to the last minute, hoping to make the big find that'd make Dad and me secure. Neil had a premonition he'd not come back."

"Tell that to Sinclair."

"I'm through with him, too! I'm going myself. I'll show the both of you!"

Finlay marched out, and didn't look back.

Something more than a week later, he was regretting his rational attitude. He had been regretting it every weary mile of the drive from Alipore to Mandalay.

After several days of uncompromising silence back in Alipore, Finlay had called to renew his appeal to reason, only to hear that Nadine had left for the mines. Her car was gone. Since Nadine had called his bluff, he had to intercept her and talk sense into her, before she got to the hinterland.

"Not much left," Finlay remarked to his driver, as they groped for landmarks at the outskirts of Mandalay.

Jang Bahadur surveyed the expanse of charred rubbish and blackened roofing tiles. The stocky Gurkha was two inches shorter than Finlay, and a good deal wider. He had a bullet head close-coupled to his shoulders by a neck that made up in thickness what it lacked in length. A retired soldier, he had worked with Finlay on the pipeline. Jang was a good man to take along.

Coolies were cleaning up the rubbish. Others worked in the railroad yards, where wood-fired switch engines puffed and wheezed. Carpenters erected semi-permanent buildings.

A few hours of prowling and questioning forced Finlay to conclude that no white woman had stopped in Mandalay to stock up for the final bout with the jungle. Jang tooled the jalopy along the cart track which led northwest. It passed through cane brakes, bamboo. It wound through stands of teak, tall and leafless, waiting for the rains to coax out new foliage and purple blossoms.

Thabeikkyin was ten miles away when Jang observed, "Something is knock loose."

"No wonder, with this road and this car!"

The crate lost way. The universal, Finlay learned, was shot. "We walk. Might get an ox cart up the line."

"Can do." Jang got out. Then, "Hey, look, comes one car."

A horn brayed. Finlay cursed, then said, "Tell that Hindu to push us to the next wide spot if he wants to pass."

The man who quit the wheel wore enough beard to stuff a mattress. He was a foot taller than Finlay, even after allowing for his turban. And his grim face was familiar.

A woman wearing a scarlet *sari*, red-and-gold lacquered shoes, and a multicolored head-scarf, bounced out of the open car. Bracelets and anklets jangled. A middle-aged Hindu maid, wearing sober blue, walked very straight, a pace behind her mistress.

Finlay, at last believing what he saw, demanded, "Nadine—What's the idea?"

"I had a hunch the army or the civil servants would send a white woman right back home," she answered, matter-of-factly. "Hence the make-up."

"Well, my bus blew up for keeps, but at least I've got enough fuel to start us back." He caught her by the arm. "Jang, break out the gas and stuff."

"*I* am going to Mogok! You and your man are welcome. Or, you can walk back to India!"

Her eyes challenged him. She meant it. "Jang and I can walk out," he told her.

Nadine smiled. "Of course you can."

Then, he noticed her left hand. Funny he'd not observed sooner. That diamond was gone, the ostentatious thing whose every flash had said, LOTS OF LUMBER MILLS.

"I'd lose face if I backed down," Finlay grumbled. "Not promising I'll work the lease, but let's have a look at it."

"AREN'T you sorry you beefed and pulled a long face?" Nadine asked him. "Isn't everything ticking?"

Finlay got up from his rattan chair, went to the veranda railing to look up and down the rocky valley from whose floor coolies dug the ruby-bearing gravel. Hump-shouldered bullocks drew it in carts to the washing mill. Stocky mountaineers were at work on the lines of bamboo piping which brought water from the upper slopes.

"Diggers are digging," he grudgingly admitted, "the trommels are splashing away, the sifting gadget shakes the little hunks from the big ones—what's that on your wrist?"

"Neil's identification tag. The one I sent him."

As she spoke, she handed him the silver oval which she'd unsnapped from her wrist. He took it, glanced at the name, rank and number, all mechanically. He turned the disc over and read the inscription on the back. "Eighty-four Thousand Gates of the Law. That's odd."

"Isn't it? I've wondered and wondered."

There stood Nadine, bracelets and anklets jangling.

"Must mean something. Was Neil interested in Buddhism, or—"

"Oh, I know how we can settle that!"

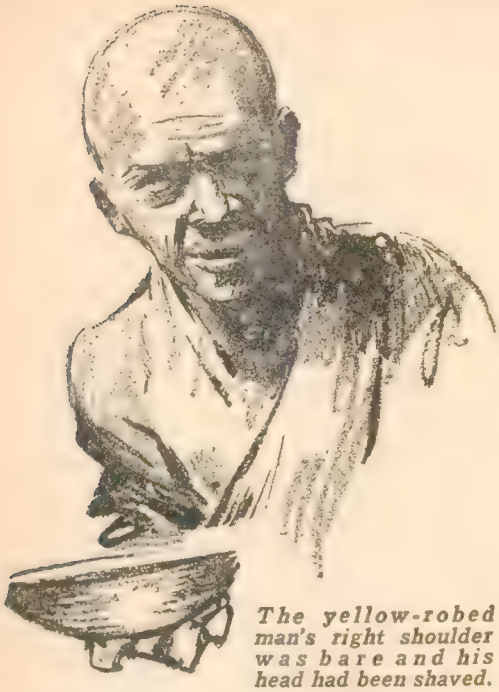
"Ask Lu Sadaw?" At Nadine's nod, he went on, "You said Neil wrote and told you that if you ever had any trouble on this claim, see Lu Sadaw."

"We've had no trouble, so far."

"Here's some you've not thought about."

A creaking cart labored upgrade, in the direction of the bungalow in which Nadine and her father and brother had made their headquarters before the war. The body of the vehicle was of teak planks, a chest on wheels. Two heavy locks secured it.

"The concentrate, the rubies-if-any," Finlay continued. "When they sort the gems from the rubbish, you'll be stolen blind."



The yellow-robed man's right shoulder was bare and his head had been shaved.

"You can hardly blame the natives for wondering how come we have a right to their valley."

"Mmm . . . no, you can't. And that's another thing. Those claim jumpers the constabulary ran out when we got here. That's worried me."

"I don't think we need bother Lu Sadaw about it, though."

"How'd Neil get along with the monks?"

"Oh, Lu Sadaw is a grand old person. Neil and Dad built a little pagoda."

"The devil they did!"

She read his tone and his face. "No, not bribery. Just simply taking a friendly interest in local customs. Because we were going back to native methods."

"Eighty-four Thousand Gates of the Law . . . that's Buddhist. Eight hells, thirteen heavens. I'm asking Lu Sadaw. Let's see him soon as we can."

The carter had pulled up at the sorting shed, which was not far from the tin-roofed bungalow. After unhitching his bullocks, he drove away, leaving the first batch of concentrate.

Then Finlay saw the yellow-robed man who came up the slope. His right shoulder was bare. His head had been shaved. Except for short white bristles of hair, he'd been bald. As he passed the pipe fitters, they quit work, placed their hands palm to palm, raised them as they bowed and knelt.

"That's Lu Sadaw now!"

"Speak of the devil!"

"I'd not ask him about the Gates of the Law. Not right now."

Finlay wondered why not, then shrugged it off. Rubies were found in gravel, not in mystic sayings.

There was no telling Lu Sadaw's age. His cheeks were sunken, his mouth had puckered lines about it, but these had no meaning, if only because the shaving of hair and eyebrows made his face something not to be judged by normal standards. His eyes, Mongolian-slanted, were deep-set and intensely alive.

"How do you do, Miss Hudson? How nice to see you," the visitor said in English. "And this is Mr. Finlay?"

Finlay acknowledged the abbot's recognition. The old man seated himself on the ground, easily and smoothly, in the lotus posture which would tear apart the hips and knees and ankles of any but a contortionist.

"*Aum! Mani padme hum!*" he intoned. Then, "It is good to see you, Miss Hudson. I hope your father is well?"

He knew that Neil was dead, but offered no condolence. Death is no calamity in the eyes of a Buddhist monk; death is merely the completing of one circle, and the starting of another.

"He's well, thank you, but getting feeble."

"Rubies," the abbot resumed, "are trash not worth hunting, but since it is your fate to hunt, I wish you success."

Though the abbot did not close his eyes, they became vacant, and so did his face, as if all the life had gone from him, leaving only a shell. When Lu Sadaw spoke again, it startled Finlay, as if the man had materialized where but a moment earlier there had been a vacancy.

"Life after life," he said, "we are bound to the Wheel, and the Circle closed back upon itself. But only because we wish it. Whatever happens, it is your doing, and in your way, you command the Lords of Karma, the makers of your fate. You command them until your own desire and your own act give them command of you. That is the Law."

He got up, and made a gesture of benediction. As though from afterthought, he said to Finlay, "From the crest where the highway drops into Mogok, you can see the roof of our monastery. It is on the wagon track which leads to Mr. Sinclair's teak lease. Some day, come to see me."

Without further word, he went down grade.

FINLAY turned to Nadine. "He said Sinclair had a teak lease. Meaning the Owen Sinclair I had in my hair in Alipore?"

She nodded. "He may be up this way from Rangoon."

Finlay grimaced. "Well, the coolies are knocking off. I'll go down and pay them. Re-

gardless of Lu Sadaw's blessing, we'll guard that load of concentrate. Jang and Ram Singh and I, we'll take turns."

That night, when he took Jang's place, Finlay sat with his back against an upright of the sorting shed, and drew his blanket closer. At four thousand feet elevation, the wind had teeth.

He scarcely expected an attempt to steal the chest of concentrate, since the entire lot probably contained only a few small gems, but there might be sabotage of the plant.

The evicted claim jumpers, and the *twinzaya* familes—the "eaters"—clans who for centuries had owned the ruby-laden area, might cause trouble. When the British took over, they had recognized the traditional rights granted by the Burmese kings. While it should make no difference to the "eaters" whether claim jumpers paid royalties, or whether Nadine Hudson paid them, three years of Jap occupation had lowered white prestige.

Presently, the silence began to speak. Bats twittered. Somewhere, an owl hooted, and from a great distance came the cry of a leopard. These voices accentuated the emptiness and the isolation of the rocky valley, a small world of its own.

Moonrise began to silver the limestone rimrock. The wind shifted, bringing a new sound, the solemn note of gongs. It rolled and swelled and stretched as though the brazen discs were reluctant ever to stop vibrating. Since it was not loud, even at the start, its persistence fascinated Finlay. At last, when the sound had died, he tried to pick the ghost of it out of the silence. And he succeeded. . .

Lu Sadaw's music reached far from the monastery. The monks are sending me something . . . Buddhists claimed that they could *silently* intone the sacred syllable, AUM. This now seemed possible. The gong was whispering AUMMMMMM. . . He shook his head. That wasn't the ghost of a bell. Yellow-robed men chanted a ritual in Pali.

"Aum, mani padme hum! Hail, jewel in the Lotus!"

Finlay started violently, and shivered.

He awoke to the uncomfortable knowledge that he'd been asleep with his eyes open, entranced, taken far from his post. The abrupt return shook him. His skin crawled and crept, and his pulse raced. He would have got up, had fear not warned him. Instinct had jerked him back, and just in time.

He smelled coconut oil, garlic, sandalwood. Someone had crept up on him. Moon-glare dazzled him. He could not probe the shadows close at hand. He flung himself aside, just as the heavy blade of a *dah* swished out. It thudded against the bamboo column. Finlay, sprawled out, drew his pistol.

Since a shooting was the last thing he could afford, he slashed out with the barrel. The lurker, however, had recovered, and instead of renewing the attack, he whirled to run. So, instead of laying him out with a smack across the head, Finlay raked shoulder and back.

With a yell, the man bounded into the open. "Halt, or I'll fire!"

Finlay scrambled upright, leveled his pistol, and cut loose. He took his time, and shot carefully, because he wanted the man alive and uninjured. A feud would be disastrous. Finlay's bullet kicked up a spurt of earth. The fugitive, a gambler, ran all the faster, ducking some boulders, hurdling others. He should have taken a nasty fall, but he didn't. Finlay knew better than to risk chasing him over that treacherous ground. Moreover, he'd given the *dacoit* too much of a lead.

Then Jang and Ram came running. If he pursued, they might wing him by mistake. So Finlay turned to call, "Missed the bastard! And he's gone!"

His hair, gleaming from coconut oil, was gathered in a topknot.

CHAPTER II

"EIGHTY-FOUR THOUSAND GATES OF THE LAW"

THE gilded spire of a pagoda guided Finlay as he and Jang Bahadur rode their shaggy Shan ponies to Mogok village. Presently, he was looking down on the red-tiled roof of Subdivision Headquarters, the hard-packed yellow clay of the plaza, the awn-

Finlay, sprawled out, drew his pistol, but the man with the dah *instead of renewing the attack, whirled to run.*

ings of bazaar booths, and a sprawl of dwellings, some bamboo, others of teak or "jungle" wood.

Slender Burmese women minced along, pigeon-toed, miraculously keeping their wrap-around skirts from parting higher than the knee. Some balanced wicker baskets on their heads. Others carried gaudy parasols. They looked so much more like dolls than women, that there was no telling whether their stares came from curiosity, or from surprise at seeing Finlay alive.

Finlay caught all this from the corner of his eye as he followed Jang, who had asked the way to the Deputy Assistant Commissioner's house.

U Taw Sein's home was perched on piers perhaps eight feet high. A thorny hedge surrounded it. A *mali,* wearing only a breech clout and mushroom-shaped straw hat, watered the garden.

Finlay had scarcely dismounted and handed the reins to Jang when a plump little man came down from the veranda. He wore horn-rimmed glasses, a starched white jacket, and a green brocaded *longyi* drawn snugly about his rump. His hair, gleaming from coconut oil, was gathered in a topknot and bound with a red kerchief. This was the Deputy Assistant Commissioner, who was so glad to see Finlay that he put his hands palm to palm, and raised them as he bowed.

His queer sing-song English, usually intelligible, was now little short of incoherent. "Come, please be seated, I am happy to see you, Mr. Finlay, I hope you have been well," he babbled. Then, in the house, he presented a withered, sharp-eyed little lady.

"My wife . . ." U Taw Sein giggled. "She does not speak English. That is good . . . our women are too smart with one tongue. Let me offer refreshment . . . you are tired . . . how is ruby mining?"

The front room, clean enough, though comfortably littered, contained a gilt-framed mirror, a victrola, two straight-backed chairs, several brass spittoons, and a few mats. On a small table sat a betel-nut box and a large Bible.

After the mistress of the house had served green tea, long cheroots, and candied ginger root, U Taw Sein resumed, "I am happy that you abandon duty to pay me a call."

Finlay dug into his pocket and handed U Taw Sein a brass betel-nut box. It still contained

slaked lime, tobacco, betel and the spicy sweetening to complete the chew.

"This belongs to someone who tried to chop me in half last night, in the sorting shed."

"What? You mean—did I misunderstand?"

"A man tried to finish me with a *dah*. He got away, but dropped this."

"I thought—I feared . . . the 'eaters' have muttered . . . anticipation of labor trouble . . . but an overt act . . . I am chagrined, humiliated. You have reported to constabulary?" he concluded, anxiously.

"Do you know why not?"

"Confusion blocks my reasoning power."

"I want that man myself. To find out why he tried to finish me. If something is wrong, we want to make it right with you people. Maybe you can pick him from his chewing mixture?"

"But—but—there are so many people."

"I'm new here, but I know all about bazaar gossip. You can find out. Then, there's a law that let's you deport anyone who has outlaw relatives. If anyone has a *dacoit* in the family, you can put on the screws. Whether he's a convict, or just suspected of being a tough customer. Use that, and someone will talk to protect himself."

U Taw Sein's eyes widened as if he'd never heard of such a method. Actually, it was standard practice. "You propose blackmail in a good cause?"

Finlay grinned amiably. "Good for me, and for you. Maybe the man didn't really intend to kill me. Maybe he was sent to throw a scare into me."

"Intimidate you from working?"

"Mmmm . . . more than that. Suppose I told Inspector Keane we needed constabulary protection. That'd make it bad for you. You're responsible for peace and good order. You're new in office, and others want the job."

"How you understand the Burmese mind," the Deputy Assistant Commissioner said, admiringly. "I am grateful that you come directly to me, trusting me confidentially. Rest assured, Mr. Finlay, the snake in the grass will be laid by the heels, as it were."

U Taw Sein's assurances, however, were hardly substantial enough to offset anything as material as the blade of a *dah*. Finlay decided to see Lu Sadaw; so, on his way back to the diggings, he found the road which led toward the gilded spire and the yellow roof-tiles of the monastery, and followed it.

PRESENTLY, he and Jang came to a clearing hedged by cactus. Set well back was the monastery, all of ornately carved teak. The gilded gables reflected the sun. Red lacquered pillars supported a veranda canopy which skirted three sides of the building. Mangoes, tamarinds, and palms shaded the monastery; broad-leaved plantains clustered about it and about the small pagodas tapering up to gilded points.

Jang dismounted to hold the horses. Finlay went across the sand-strewn enclosure, and toward the cloistered veranda where monks sat meditating or reading the Pali scriptures.

Lu Sadaw came from the shadowy interior. "It is good to see you, Mr. Finlay."

"If you're not busy with services—"

"Please come into the shade."

Finlay followed him down the corridor, where he seated himself on a bench. He was so near three of the half-dozen small pagodas that he could see the details of their decorations, and the images housed in niches of stucco and brick and masonry.

"You sweep the sand every day?"

"One of our duties," the abbot answered.

"Cleanest spot for miles around," Finlay observed, and asked himself, *What white man's been stamping around leaving heel prints?* Someone had been giving the pagodas a close inspection, judging from the tracks. But that was Lu Sadaw's business. . .

He went on, "Something has puzzled me. I don't know much about Buddhism, and what I've heard is muddled up."

"Many things are said," Lu Sadaw admitted, gravely. "My duty is to explain the Law as best I can."

"What is the Law?"

"That which is higher than the Gods, who are only agents of the Law."

"I'm afraid I don't understand. Maybe what you mean is, all creation is held together by a power that's bigger than anything that expresses it. For instance, the British raj works through soldiers and officials, and it's bigger than any of the people who seem to run the show."

"You do well enough," the abbot conceded.

"To be honest with you, I'm not looking for religion."

"Some look, and some do not look. A man finds what he seeks."

"Does he, really?"

"Sometimes"—a sly little smile—"what he did not seek."

Finlay came very near mentioning the encounter at the sorting shed, but thought better of it. Instead, "I've heard of the Eighty-four Thousand Gates of the Law."

"If I were very wise, and you very understanding, I might in a few years give you a hint."

"Probably there's no short-cut. But no harm trying."

The abbot was beginning to enjoy the sparring. *"Na-mo-O-mi-to-fuh,"* he intoned, in Mongolian sing-song. "Those words open the Eighty-four Thousand Gates."

"Sounds Chinese."

"It is Chinese, Mr. Finlay." A queer, trenchant look. "Chinese, and not Pali. But isn't *one* gate sufficient?"

Finlay got into the spirit of it. "A man can't go through more than one gate at a time. And a gate must give the answer to life, the world, Creation."

"There are many ways to one conclusion, some quick, some slow, some straight, some winding."

"Which way did Neil Hudson take? Was he a Buddhist convert?"

"No, but he was good to the poor. He dealt honestly. He went into the army to kill, not for the love of killing, but because he believed it to be his duty. And he built a pagoda."

"Which pagoda?"

Lu Sadaw pointed at the one circled by a white man's footprints.

"May I go over and look at it closely?"

"Some go without asking—some ask."

Finlay got up. "I ought to go back to the diggings. Some other time, since you don't mind."

"You can't read Pali?"

"No, and I can't understand it. Neither can I understand why a Burmese man tried to kill me last night. I'm here for my own profit, but I'm also here to help Neil Hudson's sister. He wrote, telling her to ask you for help if she needed any."

"A man is bound by the choices he makes. Whoever struck at you last night, he made an evil choice. It is written, on Neil Hudson's pagoda, *Not where others fail, or do, or leave undone—the wise man notices what he himself has done, or left undone.* And come back, Mr. Finlay. You are welcome."

"Thank you, Lu Sadaw."

"Peace to all living things!"

BACK at the ruby diggings, Finlay found Nadine sitting on the veranda with Owen Sinclair. Worse yet, that diamond blazed from her finger. Still worse, she looked very happy about everything.

The big, sandy-haired Englishman got up. "Oh, hello, Finlay. Too bad pickings have been so lean."

Whether Sinclair referred to rubies or to Nadine, Finlay didn't like it. He reached for the screen door and said, "Wrong number. Never talk shop at the club."

"Oh, sit down, Mike! Have a drink."

He found a rattan chair and spent a moment sizing up Owen Sinclair. "You're a long way from Rangoon."

Sinclair chuckled, inflated his broad chest with the air of one who finds life better than good. "Can't get rid of a bad penny, eh, Nadine? Truth is, I came up with the new District Forest Officer, Eric Wilson. We've a stand of teak—my company, I mean, not Wilson and I—girdled for logging in '42. Sawmill simply has to have something to saw."

"You'll find time for some shooting, I guess?"

Sinclair's long, bony face glowed as he answered, "Righto! Try and join us. You'll like Wilson. Knows the country like a book." He swirled his brandy-and-water. "How do you like Mogok?"

'Elevation's one nice thing about it. How do you find the natives? Changed much from pre-war?"

Sinclair shrugged. "No fair complaints, so far. You mustn't get the wind up, just because that beggar tried for your head last night."

"So *you* know all about it?"

Nadine explained, "I thought Owen could advise me."

"It's your business, not mine."

"I assure you," Sinclair said, stiffly, "the story won't go further."

"How much influence does Lu Sadaw have around here?"

"Never heard of him."

"Oh, but you have!" Nadine corrected. "The abbot."

"Yes, now that you mention it." Then, chuckling, "My dear, you'd hardly expect me to spend time around a monastery, would you?"

"But it is a lovely spot."

"To be sure," Sinclair admitted. "Though I'd leave that for sightseers. Quite too busy getting organized."

Sinclair hoisted himself from his chair, fingered his sun helmet for a moment, then said, cheerily, "Suppose you join us at camp. We'll have a bit of bridge. Wilson'd be delighted."

Finlay remembered the footprints near Neil's pagoda. While there was no sand in the bungalow compound and the earth was stone-hard, water from the trommels had made muddy patches. So he suggested, "Why not have a look at the washing plant? We've done a lot of neat improvising, but it works."

"Thanks, but I've had a personally conducted tour."

When Sinclair had gone, Finlay turned on Nadine. "I asked you not to sound off about that business last night. I've got my own ways of handling that. We don't want publicity, or we're liable to be run out."

"Owen's spent years in Burma."

"You dug up that ring in a hurry."

"I was wearing it when you dashed off for Mogok! You didn't have to try to overtake me."

He gestured toward the washing plant. "It's all yours. Why don't you let him run it for you?"

Her eyes widened. "Don't be that way, Mike. Anyway, Owen can't operate this claim, he has

so many properties and interests. Oh, I know I quarreled with him, but he convinced me he simply couldn't drop everything for this tiny enterprise, a wild gamble." Nadine smiled, and too sweetly. "If you think it's too dangerous here, Mike, I won't ask you to stay."

He slammed the door as he left. Once in his own shack, he settled down to planning a quick exit. But he decided, finally, that it wasn't any longer a question of whether or not Nadine needed his help. It was simply that he'd let himself be baited, and he'd liked the hook—until Sinclair showed up.

Then he turned the spotlight on Sinclair, to whitewash Nadine. His first move was to hurry down to the washing shed.

There he found footprints, big ones, and also Nadine's. Sinclair had looked the outfit over. Finlay noted the heel pattern. It matched that in the sand at the monastery. While Sinclair had not in so many words denied having been there, he'd intended to convey just that.

Why? Maybe Sinclair was interested in the Eighty-four Thousand Gates of the Law. Since he'd given Nadine her brother's dog-tag, he must have wondered at the curious phrase.

The simple but wrong way would be to ask Lu Sadaw. Wrong, because the abbot, true to type, would keep his own counsel, instead of taking sides.

IN THE morning, Finlay went to the shed where the concentrate, after being shaken through a series of graduated screens, to grade it for size, was taken to the sorting tables. Since his own unaided vigilance could not cover everything, he had engaged Shan mountaineers to watch the Burmese workmen, for the former, being expert thieves, would make it their pride to forestall the latter.

Ruby and sapphire appeared now and then among the gravel of the finest *byon;* and there were spinels and tourmalines also, all of them dulled by having been rolled and tumbled with the rock and earth washed down from the hills.

The darting fingers finally tricked him, and the incessant chatter and spitting made his head whirl. Catlike, patient, apparently ignoring his presence and that of the sharp-eyed Shans, the sorters had only to wait for that inevitable instant of wavering attention. . .

Nadine, meanwhile, found time for riding with Sinclair, and for pigeon-shooting with him and Wilson. Worse yet, as far as Finlay was concerned, the two made her bungalow their cocktail-hour headquarters.

Wilson, the forestry officer, was shy and silent; an over-grown schoolboy still dazed by the war. But for his generous press agent,

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Owen Sinclair, no one would have suspected him of distinguished service. Finlay liked Wilson, though he didn't quite know why. Finally, however, the answer became clear—he wasn't sounding off, or telling anybody how to do things, or playing up to Nadine. . .

One evening, Nadine asked him to show her visitors the day's take of gems. Finlay got the packets of "rough," and set them on the table.

"Quite pretty," Wilson said.

The observation should have sounded vapid, but it didn't. He fingered one of the red crystals, and squinted at it between tow-colored lashes. "Romantic. Washed out of the muck, and finally ends in some lady's jewel case."

This was a long speech for Wilson, who was something of a human totem pole.

Sinclair's retort, perhaps only by contrast, seemed impatient and belittling. "Brown ladies! These won't get to white-man markets."

The bald truth made Finlay redden to the ears. He snapped to his feet, knocking over the table, and scattering the corn-flower blue of sapphires, the deep red of garnets, the fire of rubies and of spinels over the floor. Startled, Sinclair got up. The move robbed Finlay of the instant he needed for cooling off. Instead, he dished it out, without warning. He shook Sinclair, but did not floor him.

"You run the show, loudmouth! You find the kind for royalty and white ladies!"

Bleak-faced and half-smiling, Sinclair came back at him. It was clear that he enjoyed Finlay's having made a fool of himself. It was even better than he could have expected, for Nadine, aside from a gasp of dismay, had retreated, saying not a word.

Wilson sputtered a protest which both ignored.

Finlay had his hands full. The best he could say for himself was that he wasn't seriously outclassed. Then he realized that Sinclair was needling him, stinging him, tempting him to blow up and lay himself open for a Sunday punch. He tightened up, and socked the play out of Sinclair.

All set to lay the man out—

But Finlay slipped on the scattered gems; not enough to bring him down, but sufficiently to break his balance, and leave him open. Sinclair made it good.

The wallop floored Finlay. Though the lights didn't go out, he lay there, clawing teak and rubies, entirely conscious, yet unable to get up. Wilson said, with diffidence and embarassment, "I think we should be leaving, Miss Hudson."

Sinclair, breathing heavily, paid his compliments as though nothing had happened.

"I'll get your hats," Nadine said, and she did so.

The visitors were gone when Finlay was able to sit up.

"Find a broom, and I'll sweep up the treasure."

Nadine helped him. And as they sat, sorting the mixture, she said, "Don't be so touchy, Mike."

CHAPTER III

LU SADAW DROPS A HINT

U TAW SEIN himself went with Finlay to the bazaar where sellers and buyers faced each other across tables a foot high, to bargain for parcels of gems laid out on brass trays.

"Let a broker handle your first dealing," the Deputy Assistant Commissioner advised. "Watch, learn—and beware of scoundrels. Newcomer is like dove venturing into serpent's den. Pray let me use influence to get fair play."

U Taw Sein hailed a sharp-eyed little man whose smile showed only half a dozen teeth, and all of them blackened. "This is Maung Ba, integrity guaranteed. I commend you into his hands. And now, official duty calls me."

Finlay handed the parcel of "rough" to Maung Ba, whom he followed through the crowd of traders until, finally, the broker found a customer, and seated himself at a table.

After preliminary sparring came the ancient routine of secret bidding: buyer and seller joined hands, the fingers being concealed by the long sleeves of their jackets. Asked and bid prices were made by finger-signals, so that only the parties to the deal would know the closing figure. One finger might mean ten or a hundred or a thousand rupees, depending on the value of the lot; two fingers, twenty, two hundred, or two thousand. The point of it all was that should the purchaser later wish to re-sell in Mogok, he'd not be handicapped by having it known what the lot had cost him.

When the parcel was finally sold, and Maung Ba got his commission, Finlay and Jang divided the heavy bags of silver rupees and set out for the diggings. When they came to the crest from which the monastery spires were visible, Finlay pulled up to give his pony a breathing spell.

"Jang, how far is it to Sinclair's lease?"

"Maybe two smokes."

Finlay glanced at the sun. "Let's go for a look. You used to work for Irrawaddy Teak, Ltd., didn't you?"

"Sure. Driving elephant."

"Hell you did! I thought it was a father-to-son job, always kept in the family, no outsiders allowed."

"My old man driving elephants back home, I learn elephant talk before I go to Indian Army."

As they passed the monastery, Finlay saw a *sais* holding two horses. "Ever see those ponies before?"

"Sinclair."

"All the better."

They rode several miles, coming finally to a tin-roofed bungalow and a sprawl of native huts. Several servants lolled about the compound of the former, but there was no sign of logging crews, nor of elephants, though it was late enough in the year for the animals to have come from their dry-season quarters along the river.

Jang cocked his head. "No elephant working. No wooden bells, elephant not go out to eat. Damn funny."

They rode on, Jang now leading the way. There were the stumps of teak felled before the war, and there were others still too young for cutting. Finlay, noting the details Jang pointed out, soon began to doubt Sinclair's story about the urgent need of timber.

Before a tree may be legally felled, a District Forest Officer has to indicate his approval by cutting a "blaze" and then stamping the exposed wood with a die, the Burmese characters identifying him. In addition, there is a date, for after the operator has girdled the tree to kill it, it must stand three years, until the sap has dried out.

"Nothing girdled. So no cutting here till 1948. Right?"

"That right. Someone need teak quick, not work here."

"He said trees were girdled in 1942."

Jang grunted. "Damn bloody liar."

They continued their ride through the forest, sweeping in a circle, but found nothing to contradict Finlay's conclusion. Clearly, Sinclair had come north for anything but business. While that was Nadine's affair, it was odd that the devoted fiancé couldn't help her run the ruby mine.

Finlay considered pushing on to the District Forestry Officer's headquarters, but thought better of it. Neither snooping nor tale-bearing would get very far with Eric Wilson. A guest was a guest, and that settled it. So, as dusk reached into the forest, Finlay and Jang retraced their course.

Approaching the monastery, he noted that Sinclair's horse was gone. After a moment, he said, "Jang, I'm going to see the abbot. You ride on with the money."

The Gurkha frowned. "I wait. Better wait."

Looking back as he crossed the clearing, Finlay saw Jang leading the animals into the forest which skirted the road.

Lu Sadaw was sitting in the shadows of the veranda.

"I saw you ride past, a few hours ago. I'm glad you stopped."

"Thanks. I've been thinking of the Gates of the Law."

The abbot smiled. "Your conclusions would interest me."

"They're precisely zero."

"Since you ask me questions, it is right for me to ask you."

"Certainly."

"Where did you hear of the Gates of the Law?"

"Engraved on Neil Hudson's identification tag. Sometime after his sister sent it to him. If I knew what it meant, it might help. Right during the worst of the retreat, he wrote his sister one letter after another, begging her to get the mine going as soon as the Japs left Burma."

"In the midst of death and hardship, he thought always of rubies. Interesting. An ob—ob—"

"Obsession?"

"Of course, thank you."

"And," Finlay went on, "he had some native jeweler engrave those words on his identification tag. You—your monks—the only Buddhists he ever knew. So, it must mean something about his big interest, the mine. You remember, he sent his father and sister home,

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but he stayed until the Japs were in sight."

"That is not quite true. He may have told his sister that he'd stay till the last minute, yet he didn't. He left a day or two ahead of them. He took time to come here to say good-by. I was away. He spent the night here. Then he left."

Asked and bid prices at the bazaar were made by finger-signals, so that only the parties to the deal would know the closing figure.

"But no hint as to how you could help his sister?"

"None."

Finlay got up. "Thank you, I'd better go."

Lu Sadaw pointed to one of the dark passages. "Make yourself at home. Meditate. Be serene. You have been too busy to think. You are perhaps on the trail of truth, but you hurry, hurry, hurry. You're anxious—you defeat yourself."

"Well—"

"You are welcome. Your man? Your horses? I'll see they're comfortable. Excuse me, I must go now."

During the following three hours, Finlay sat on the floor and looked out over the clearing. Several times, he was on the point of ending what seemed a Burmese game. Yet he could not quite believe that Lu Sadaw was mocking him.

Finally, he heard, among other night sounds, the approach of a horse. A man dismounted.

and approached the monastery. The abbot came out to meet him. Owen Sinclair had returned.

Lu Sadaw went with his visitor to find a seat in the corridor, only a few yards from Finlay. A yellow-robed novice came out with a bowl of oil in which floated a burning wick.

"You've got the answer, Lu Sadaw?"

"To recite, 'PRAISE BE TO AMITA BUDDHA,' opens the Eighty-four Thousand Gates of the Law. Does that help?"

"Is that all you can tell me?"

"If a man recites, 'BEHOLD AMITA BUDDHA WITH ALL HIS SAINTS BEFORE HIM,' just before he dies, he'll be reborn in paradise."

Sinclair, when he left, seemed to have made no more sense of the answers than Finlay had made. Yet Finlay was encouraged by one

thing: that Lu Sadaw, despite his evasiveness, had given him a ringside seat.

AS THE days went on, Finlay saw more and more point to Neil Hudson's letter, in which he'd advised Nadine to see Lu Sadaw if she needed help. There had been thievery right from the start. Some of it was so brazen as to make him wonder whether the sorters were baiting him.

Sour-faced members of the various "eater" families squatted in the vicinity, chewing betel and spitting red juice. They were waiting for an incident. They wanted one. He was sure that a strike or worse was brewing, so he ignored the sleight-of-hand that robbed Nadine. However, he couldn't ask Lu Sadaw for help until trouble materialized.

Much of the loot was recovered each evening when the sorters were searched. "*Thakin,* my enemy put this gem in my garment," was the story, and everyone's face was saved. Jailing or dismissing the sorter would only make way for a fresh thief.

"Look now," Finlay at last said to old Maung Tin, the pucker-faced and hard-eyed dean of the "eaters." "How can you complain about your royalties when you see the stealing as clearly as I do?"

"The Builder of Pagodas has seen thievery?"

Finlay ignored the mockery. "Maung Tin, all is not well. It has never been well. Let us understand each other."

"Very well, *thakin.* You English paid the 'eaters', and it was good. You ruled the land, which was not good, and not too bad. You ate the land, so you owed us protection, but when the Japs came, you ran and you sold us into their hands. For these three years, *thakin,* they were worse than you ever were."

"Then it's good we're back."

"Isn't it the law that when a ship is thrown away by her captain, she belongs to whoever brings her home? Can he meet her at port and say, lo, now she is mine again?"

"Maung Tin, there's nothing I can say to that."

The next day, Finlay saw more than he could overlook, and this was deftly done, to trick his eye. The move was almost perfect, failing only because of his luck, not his vigilance.

He snatched the man's wrist. The toss went wild. What was supposedly a cud of betel nut contained a gem almost the size of a hazelnut. The thief screamed, and clawed like a bazaar wench. Finlay chopped the edge of his hand against the back of the man's head, and laid him out. The "eaters" came racing up. Those at the sorting tables bounced to their feet. None was armed, yet rage building up into hysteria made them dangerous as wild animals. The Shans set to watch the Burmese wanted none of it. They all wormed themselves clear.

To draw a gun on unarmed men would finish Finlay in Burma. And not to draw—

He slugged, booted, shouldered. They clawed, they tried to drag him down. It was not so much Finlay whom they fought as it was what he represented. Maung Tin had spoken for all these people.

Now it was too late to go for his gun, and he needed it.

Then Jang came along, his voice rumbling over the squeal and chatter. The heavy *kukri* whisked from the scabbard. For a wonder, the ferocious Gurkha used the flat, and not the edge. "Sons-of-dog-fathers! Back! Or I'll cut you in half!"

Ram Singh charged into the tangle, just as Finlay struggled to his feet. The tall Sikh plied a staff, cracking heads right and left. That finished the riot. Maung Tin came up and spoke to the sorters, now that his influence was no longer necessary.

Finlay faced them, and showed them the gem. Abraded by centuries of tumbling about with rock and gravel, its original six-sided prismatic shape had been obliterated. The surface was fogged. It had an appearance almost of sand-blasted glass, although there was an inner light. Beneath the milky mist was a redness tinged by blue, perhaps rather an orchid cast which made it differ from spectral red. All this was clear when the sun reached directly through the surface mist.

There was no guessing what flaws it might have, but neither Finlay nor those men, half abashed yet not fully cooled from trying for bare-handed murder, could doubt that it was a pigeon-blood ruby, and heavier than twenty carats.

"Wherever this is sold," he announced, "division is according to custom. Maung Tin, get a witness to come with me."

"*Thakin,* could I think of a better witness than myself?"

THAT afternoon, Owen Sinclair and Eric Wilson called at the bungalow. The former said, as he fingered the ruby, "D'you know, I've often wondered how the first man to find a gem got the notion that there was something he could improve by polishing?"

Finlay, whose luck had made it easy enough to offer honorable amends, answered Sinclair. "Just as a guess, he might've picked up a stone that hadn't been roughed up. Maybe one with a true crystalline form. With only a single face unscratched, he could've guessed the rest."

"May I?" Wilson asked, diffidently, and extended his hand, though he didn't quite touch the gem.

The forestry officer took the ruby with a daintiness amazing for his big hands. He had

somewhat the manner of a man apprehensive of damaging an infant he had picked up.

Nadine nudged Finlay. Her glance said, "*He* really loves it."

Wilson's pale eyelashes drew together. "It was quite apparent to the first man that there was beauty behind the fog . . . it's rather tantalizing. I almost saw it, then it got away from me—ah . . . now—"

He stopped short, embarrassed at having let his fancy go. "Couldn't have seen it if my imagination hadn't told me—I mean, if I'd not remembered rubies polished and cut. But it's quite clear—it'd be quite clear to that first man that this wouldn't be a pebble to shy at a bird!"

Then Finlay recognized his chance. Since he'd saved the gem, nothing he said could be considered the whining of a loser.

"Let me give the celebration something all my own. Do you mind, Nadine?"

"Take it away, Mike, it's all yours."

"What've you learned about the Eighty-four Thousand Gates of the Law since the last time I mentioned it?"

"What could I have learned? But why?"

"I've been thinking a lot." He noticed that Eric Wilson was interested, and that Sinclair pretended not to be. "And I get nowhere. You've spent a lot of time in Burma," he said to the lumberman, "maybe you could help us?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

THEY'RE BACK
...AFTER YEARS ON THE FIGHTING FRONTS!
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PROCESS
STAR
DOUBLE EDGE
BLADES
GOOD NEWS! Civilians can once again buy Star Double Edge Blades, made by the revolutionary 6NX Process! Star is the wonder blade that makes your double edge razor perform miracles!...STAR DIVISION, American Safety Razor Corp., Brooklyn 1, N. Y.
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"Neil's dog-tag, Owen."

"To be sure, but why should it mean anything, except to him? I'd forgotten it entirely."

"I think you're a liar by the manual," Finlay said, deliberately. "You've been pumping Lu Sadaw. And the last time you and I met, you told us you'd not been at the monastery. Only, I'd seen your footprints make a circle about Neil's pagoda."

Nadine stepped between the two, and said, "No brawling, *please!* Mike, what's the idea of all this?"

"Something's wrong. There hasn't been any teak girdled for three years. If your friend here is so badly in need of logs he couldn't help you, what's he doing here, killing time?"

"Am I accountable to you?" Sinclair demanded, voice shaking with wrath.

"Wilson, you're the forestry officer. How's the teak situation?" Finlay demanded.

Eric Wilson gulped. "I'm afraid it doesn't concern me."

"Very well. Since I am held to public accounting, I may as well tell you—I came here on a pretext, to look out for your welfare."

"So good of you, Owen! After I'd begged you, and you knew I'd go alone, and you let me."

Sinclair drew a deep breath. "Aren't you being unjust? I opposed you, and when I saw I'd failed, I could hardly back down. I had to have a pretext."

"You always laughed off what Neil had engraved on his dog-tag. You denied going to see Lu Sadaw, and you've time and again pooh-poohed my idea of consulting him. Just what is behind all this double-dealing?"

Sinclair bowed. "You're doing me a great injustice. I prefer not to discuss things until you've thought it over."

A servant brought Sinclair's hat. Nadine said, "Here's something to go with it."

When she drew her hand back, there was no ring on her finger. Sinclair made as if to speak, then changed his mind and went to the door.

Wilson was so embarrassed that he stuttered his good-nights.

Finlay faced Nadine. "Now give me hell."

She sighed, wearily. "Owen has been evasive about a lot of trifles. He had no reason for downright lying about trifles."

He told her how Lu Sadaw had invited him to wait. "My idea is," he concluded, "that the old abbot kept me there while he sent for Sinclair, so I could hear for myself. Judging from what I took in, he'd not told Lu Sadaw where he'd picked up those words. The old man gave me a Chinese phrase, and gave him a different line. He's been playing us both."

"But why?"

"The old man," Finlay answered, "may be trying to trip up the phonies hanging around you. Did you mean it this time, when you gave him his ring?"

She nodded. "I can't stand liars. They never change, except for the worse. And he was with Neil, right to the last. He'd know, if anyone could, just what those words might have meant. He could guess better than anyone else."

"If it's important, he might've wanted you to stay away until he could open one of the Eighty-four Thousand Gates."

"Keep that up, and I will be dizzy! What do you think we ought to do, sell the ruby in Mogok, or risk taking it back to India?"

Finlay considered for a moment. "News of a discovery spreads fast. The country is upset. Plenty danger from *dacoits*, with money like this. Better sell, and get a draft on Calcutta."

"That makes sense. When can you do it?"

"Have to have one face polished, and I don't know how long that'll take a lapidary. I'm as fidgety as the first time Jap planes hosed the pipeline gang. About one million ways of being swindled in the bazaar, broker or no broker."

She came near, and looked at him with glowing eyes. "Somehow I think you're my luck."

"Keep thinking that way, and you'll be my luck! The only way to beat this game is hit the jackpot and get out."

CHAPTER IV

SANCTUARY

ONCE a face of the ruby had been polished, Finlay, Jang and Ram Singh rode to the bazaar. Maung Tin, representative of the "eaters," jogged along, holding Finlay's stirrup leather.

Clerks and minor officials packed the shed where buyers, brokers, lapidaries, and speculators gathered to watch the contest for the biggest find since the company had gone out of business. Finlay put on a long-sleeved jacket and sat down to face Mohan Lal, a Hindu whom the broker had picked as the only one in Mogok who could handle such an important gem.

The smooth-faced trader's eyes were sad and kindly when he looked up from the gem he had examined and set back on the brass tray between him and Finlay.

"Large, *sahib*, but not of good color. And the shape, it won't cut well, there is a flaw—"

"Five *lakhs*," Finlay told him, as casually as a black-market butcher offering sirloins at three bucks a pound.

Mohan Lal smiled with polite disparagement. "*Sahib*, my wife would like it. As long as it is red, it is beautiful to her. Five thousand rupees, and my blessing."

Finlay took some large banknotes from his pocket. He laid them on the table, and picked

up the ruby. "Mohan Lal, you're poor, and you love your wife. Here's some spare change—go buy her something pretty."

The Hindu laughed. "I like to do business with you. Now?"

Finlay produced the ruby again. "Three *lakhs*."

Three hundred thousand rupees—$110,000, the price brought by the finest gem coming out of Mogok in modern times. Mohan Lal grimaced as in agony. "Ten—oh, God!—twenty thousand rupees! No more!"

This went on until Finlay came down to two *lakhs*. Meanwhile, the Hindu had upped the bid to 50,000. Then, since they were getting into the zone of plausible figures, the broker said, "Give me your hands."

Thereafter, not a word was spoken. The battle, silent, and concealed by flowing sleeves, was on. The middle-man's fingers signaled 70,000 to Finlay, who countered by holding out for just twice that figure. The Hindu went stubborn when the broker signaled to both parties, and said, "Repeat you after me, I OFFER. Repeat you after me, I ACCEPT."

He had indicated to each that he considered 100,000 a fair price.

Mohan Lal withdrew his hand. "I do not take, I do not refuse. I have to get advice and see a money lender."

"Some other will buy," the broker said.

The Hindu retorted, "The fate of this gem was complete when the world was first built. If it belongs to another, so be it."

He left the bazaar. The broker got another buyer. But after long haggling, the deal crumbled at 90,000 rupees. So, near sunset, they headed back for the diggings, to wait for another day, and another customer.

Finlay was hardly beyond the outskirts of Mogok when a courier overtook him. "*Thakin*," the man gasped, "here is a *chit*. Be pleased to read . . . I wait for the answer."

The note, written in purple aniline ink, was signed, "Mohan Lal."

"What news is it, *thakin?*" Maung Tin asked.

"That Hindu wants us to deal privately with him. At the old *dak* bungalow. Why do you think he wants this?"

The "eater's" beetling brows puckered and his eyes came to a knowing squint. "He doesn't want to pay the broker's commission."

"We'd pay that."

"But you could split the saving with Mohan Lal. That's what he wants."

"Jang, what do you think of the business?"

"You make thinkings, I make doings."

Finlay said to the courier, "Say to Mohan Lal, we come seeing him."

The runner raced toward town. Finlay held his pony to a walk, so that Maung Tin would not have to jog.

IT WAS dark when they came to the old rest-house, perched high on piers, and surrounded by a thornbrush hedge. Weeds grew rank in the compound. A match flared, and a candle took light. A figure in white stood in the doorway, and a familiar voice said, "Mr. Finlay, forgive the darkness, but I conserve lights." Mohan Lal came down the stairs, and made the token gesture of strewing dust on his turban. "Let me show you in."

He led the way. Jang whipping out his *kukri*, followed. Ram Singh brought up the rear, so that Finlay and Maung Tin were protected against ambush.

Except for a rickety table, and a metal bedstead on which the trader had spread a felt rug, the room was bare. Finlay, seating himself on the bed, gestured for the Hindu to sit beside him. Mohan Lal did so, after drawing up the table and the candle. The others squatted on the floor. Their swarthy faces were moist with sweat. Angular shadows caricatured the Mongolian features of two, and the mighty nose and beard of the third.

"You want to make a private deal, and get out before the broker finds out what we've done? I don't like that—it'll give the owner a bad name."

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"You will give him his commission, Mr. Finlay."

"The price is what we agreed?"

"Oh, yes! I do not ask you to sell to me for less than one hundred thousand."

"Then why all this monkey business?"

"I am afraid of *dacoits* enroute from here to India. The land is lawless, the British have not full control."

"And so, Mohan Lal?"

"I give you a draft on Chunder Bose & Company, of Calcutta. You go to the bazaar tomorrow, pretending to find another buyer. I am meanwhile on my way. After one-two days travel, I am ahead of the news about this ruby."

Finlay said to Jang, "Make it clear to Maung Tin he mustn't talk."

Jang, with his better command of Burmese, explained to the "eater." The old man proposed, "Give an order on Yut Ah Li. How we know any *chetty* in Calcutta honors this man's bill?"

Mohan Lal did not dispute Maung Tin's logic. "It is good that way. Mr. Finlay, you have the ruby with you?"

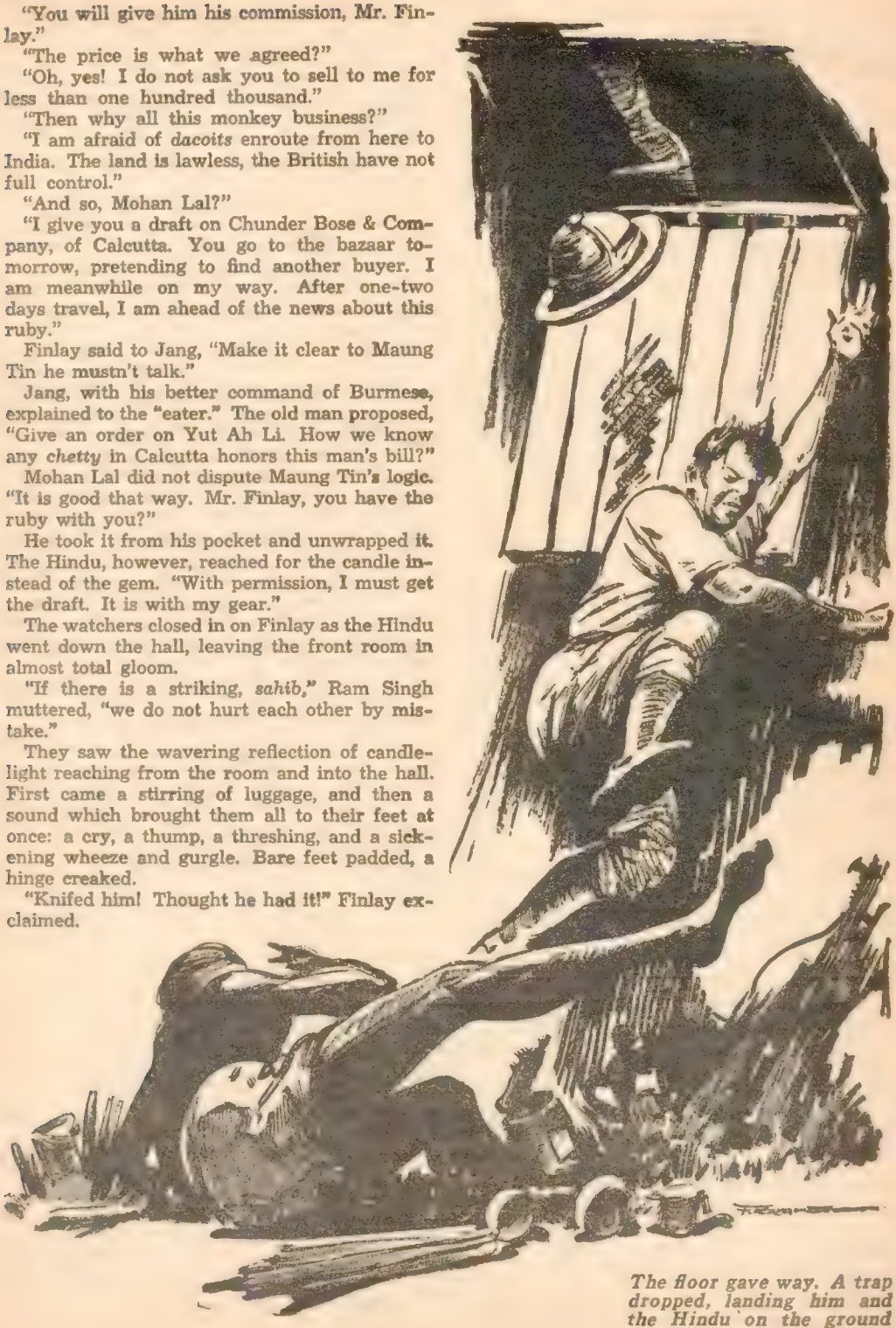
He took it from his pocket and unwrapped it. The Hindu, however, reached for the candle instead of the gem. "With permission, I must get the draft. It is with my gear."

The watchers closed in on Finlay as the Hindu went down the hall, leaving the front room in almost total gloom.

"If there is a striking, *sahib*," Ram Singh muttered, "we do not hurt each other by mistake."

They saw the wavering reflection of candlelight reaching from the room and into the hall. First came a stirring of luggage, and then a sound which brought them all to their feet at once: a cry, a thump, a threshing, and a sickening wheeze and gurgle. Bare feet padded, a hinge creaked.

"Knifed him! Thought he had it!" Finlay exclaimed.



The floor gave way. A trap dropped, landing him and the Hindu on the ground in a clutter of rubbish.

The Hindu's runner let out a yell and raced for the front. Jang said, "Now, constabulary blame us."

Finlay said, "He's not dead!"

If Mohan Lal lived, his story would make things easier; and a few seconds could be the difference between life and death. Finlay dashed down the hall, and swung into the doorway. The others raced after him, scarcely understanding why he went.

Mohan Lal lay twitching and struggling in an ever-spreading pool of red. Finlay knelt and set up the candle. Then, too late, he knew that he had snapped at bait.

The door slammed behind him. A bolt slammed home, just in time to block those who had followed. The panel vibrated from the kicks and yells of the three in the hall. Finlay went for his pistol. He got a bare glimpse of the man who, lurking behind the door, had closed it, but he had no chance to get in even one shot.

The floor gave way. A trap dropped, landing him and the Hindu on the ground, in a clutter of tins, bottles, rubbish and weeds. Half-stunned by the nasty impact, he was easy game for those who had been waiting for him to drop into their hands.

A fist-sized rock tapped him smartly on the head. Deft fingers searched, and found what they sought. A flashlight helped.

The assault melted as quickly as it had formed. Above him, the candle had set fire to the rubbish which littered the floor. Finlay tried to yell, but could make no more than a croaking sound which the shouts of Jang and Ram Singh completely overwhelmed.

The door yielded when they finally got together and drove as one. They could have scaled the partition, since between it and the roof was a two-foot gap for ventilation, but they were keyed for direct action, not head work.

Through the gaping trap, they saw Finlay. There was no wounded Hindu in sight. It was clear now that everything, including the spilled blood and Mohan Lal's cry, had been part of a well-staged trick.

Finlay checked the search of his pockets, and of the rubbish, when he was able to say, "They got it. They got it and went. You're a witness for the 'eaters,' Maung Tin."

"I am witness, *thakin*, witness that you and that Hindu have robbed the miners and the 'eaters'. We will remember this against you."

Without waiting for an answer, Maung Tin darted for the front of the compound.

NADINE said to Finlay, "Oh, forget the ruby. I'm so glad you weren't all chopped up in that fracas! Let's figure out how to square things with the miners and 'eaters,' before we have a strike or riot on our hands."

"It's even worse than that."

"How?"

"Until we're square with them, your claim can't ever be sold."

"Why not?"

"Ever hear of the Chinese custom of freezing a house until the landlord makes good on a tenant's gripe? Nobody dares occupy the place till it's got a release. Same for this mining concession. So, I've got to get that Hindu louse!"

"With the country still so upset, Inspector Keane couldn't possibly put enough constabulary on the job to cover all the trails and jungle villages."

Then Finlay proposed, "Jang and I might pick up some hot rumors in Mogok. If it'd been regular *dacoit* work, we'd have just been bushwhacked and cut up. Someone was cagy enough to see that a killing would set the whole division swarming with constabulary."

"Why not see Lu Sadaw?"

"Roger Wilco! But don't let anyone know I've gone. I'll have Jang stand guard outside my shack, as if I had the wind up."

"Why the wind up? The ruby's gone."

"I'm supposed to be afraid of the infuriated 'eaters'."

"Oh." Then, "Mike, there's reason to be afraid. You can't go prowling around alone."

"I'm going to. You keep my pistol, just in case someone takes a notion you're one of the swindlers. Keep Ram Singh close on the job. I'll take a *dah*—there's a chance of tangling with a leopard."

"Ram has a couple of Japanese rifles he salvaged somewhere. We had them hidden in the car. Take one of them."

"Those bludgeons? *You're* facing what trouble there is, if any. Nobody expects me to set out alone and afoot."

He left before she could make further objections.

After giving Jang his orders, Finlay made the most of the time he had left before moonrise. Presently, he was tramping down the wagon trail toward the monastery.

Only a little while previous there had been the deep voice of gongs and the sonorous chant of monk and novice; now it was as if all living things in the monastery had become lifeless as the Buddha sitting under the towering *pyathat*. Deep shadows of the veranda gave a suggestion of motion. He could not tell whether monks were pacing, barefooted and silent, or whether all this was illusion.

Behind him, however, there was reality. When he first heard the crackle of leaves, he knew that his uneasiness had come from an intent stare centering on his shoulder blades.

He turned. Though there was nothing to be seen, he smelled palm oil and garlic, enough to tell him that natives lurked close at hand.

Two men pounced from cover. Others fol-

After the novices had shaved Finlay's head and stained his skin, the abbot gave him his bowl.

lowed. The gleam of their blades was clear and cold. Finlay whipped out his own chopper. Judgment, however, overcame instinct. He whirled and raced across the compound, kicking up gravel at every stride, until he reached the veranda.

The Burmans waited at the entrance. While they respected the sanctuary, they would be there when he came out.

From somewhere in the inner gloom, a man said in English, "Put up your weapon."

"Lu Sadaw?"

"Lu Sadaw. You are welcome, Mr. Finlay."

The abbot spoke a few words in Burmese. A yellow-robed novice came from within, carrying a bowl of oil in which a flaming wick floated. Lu Sadaw looked at the *dah* which Finlay still held.

"It is clean," he observed.

"I don't know why they waited till I got to your gate."

"Why not ask them?"

By the flickering light, Finlay could not tell whether the smile was mocking or encouraging.

Then one of those at the entrance came to the steps. He made a profound *shiko*, and did not raise his head until he had received the abbot's blessing. Finlay was not surprised to recognize Maung Tin.

The "eater" said, "Exalted and Holy One, we don't know whether he has been robbed, or whether he's a thief."

"Am I his judge?"

"He runs also from his own people."

"Then tell the constabulary. The English will take him from a monastery—you will not."

But Maung Tin did not like the suggestion. "Holy and Exalted, we want him first."

"When he is hungry, he will come out to eat," the smiling abbot told him. Then, to Finlay, "Please come with me, sir."

Maung Tin went back to his companions. Finlay, as he followed the abbot, pondered on the quirks of Buddhism. Though the abbot would not refuse sanctuary, he would not be responsible for what happened when Finlay had to go out to get food.

Lu Sadaw himself showed Finlay to a cell whose only fixture was a straw mat. "We keep no food here. We go out each day to eat whatever charitable folks offer us. But whatever we have here, prayer, meditation, instruction, you may share."

"I have some cash. If one of your *pongyis* could be persuaded to buy me a bit of rice—"

"We are forbidden to touch money."

"I would build a pagoda. A little one, say ten-fifteen feet high."

"Yes, you would gain merit."

"Merit never gave anyone indigestion," Finlay ruefully pointed out. "How long do you suppose Maung Tin and his boys'll be waiting out there?"

"They may wait, year after year, sending for other 'eaters' to relieve them at times. A ruby is, of course, trash, but unenlightened people take them seriously." He sighed, shook his shaven head. "They have killed so many thieves that few are silly enough to steal, except from someone who has paid the 'eaters' what the law allows."

"But I didn't steal. I was robbed."

"Monks coming in from alms-gathering told me much of what happened. Much else is not entirely clear. Whatever you want to tell me, I'll listen."

Finlay decided that he could say little which the abbot hadn't heard before. Nevertheless, he began with the discovery of the gem.

At last Lu Sadaw said, "Only a fool or a stranger would have stolen before the 'eaters' got their due."

Finlay jerked back. "Being a stranger, I didn't know that."

"Even so, I don't think you tried to swindle Maung Tin."

"I'd build a couple pagodas if you made him believe that!"

"I am no man's advocate. I am to explain the law. The precepts of the Lord Buddha, who fasted forty-nine days in the wilderness."

Lu Sadaw took up his rosary of one hundred and eight amber beads, and silently recited a litany. The man's personality left the tiny cell, giving Finlay a feeling of complete aloneness and remoteness from all living things.

He became aware of gnawing hunger.

HE was startled when, at last, the abbot's personality returned to the cell, as abruptly as it had left. "Mr. Finlay, there is a way for you to eat. Put on the yellow robe of a novice, let your head be shaved, and go out with an alms bowl. The 'eaters' will respect the robe. No one else will notice you."

"You mean you'll accept me as an apprentice monk, when you know I don't believe in Buddhism?"

"Does your belief concern me? There are Eighty-four Thousand Gateways to the Absolute, and each picks his own."

"Let me talk to Maung Tin first."

"I advise you to show your faith by putting on the yellow robe."

In less than an hour, novices had shaved Finlay and given him three squares of yellow cotton, the last one large enough to drape in the manner of a toga. And they had stained his skin.

"Here is your bowl," the abbot said, after looking at Finlay and approving. "Go early, and return before the sun is too high—Your bare head won't be able to stand it."

When Finlay reached the gap in the cactus hedge, there was the taste of dawn in the air. In the murky gray, he could distinguish the features of Maung Tin and his companions. They moved as if to make way for him, respectfully and fittingly. Then they were about him, and except for his bowl, he was empty-handed.

Maung Tin said, "Good morning, Mr. Finlay. We know now that you are no thief."

"Right. But how do you know?"

"Lu Sadaw searched your clothes. And the drink he gave you would have poisoned a thief."

Finlay, remembering the bitter taste of the water the abbot had offered him, understood that in more senses than one, his search for sanctuary had been an ordeal.

"So you're satisfied?"

"Yes, *thakin.* We know now that you are really looking for the thief, you and the English lady. I followed you from her bungalow."

"Let's talk this over," he said, and squatted on his heels.

When they made a half-circle about him, he went on, "Lu Sadaw says that only a man who didn't know the ways of 'eaters' would have stolen before you got your share. And you remember how that Hindu asked me to go to the bazaar the following day, to make believe that I was looking for a customer? He had no idea of leaving. He expected to be hunted on the road, while he stayed near town."

Maung Tin made all this clear to his fellows, who had difficulty in understanding Finlay's labored speech; and they agreed.

"One more thing. A few days after I went to work, a *dacoit* tried to cut me down with a *dah.* Now, that man couldn't have been an 'eater,' though at first I thought he might've been. You didn't use your choppers tonight, when you had your chance."

"That is right, *thakin.* We followed to watch, not kill."

Finlay went on to tell of the betel-nut box, and of U Taw Sein's promise to trace the owner. "U Taw Sein," he continued, "may be trying to help me—and maybe he's been bribed to protect the man I've been looking for."

"What has all that to do with the Hindu, Mohan Lal, *thakin?*"

"Nobody could be sure I'd be killed, but there was a chance I'd be scared and quit work and the *thakin-ma* would have to shut down the mine. One man can keep his own secret, but there were several men who robbed us. That wasn't planned in a minute. So—is U Taw Sein stupid, or is someone paying him? What kind of man is U Taw Sein?"

Maung Tin went into a huddle with his men. When he had heard their opinions and guesses, he spoke for them. "U Taw Sein brought false witnesses against the old Deputy Assistant Commissioner, U Bya. He made the British believe that U Bya had been friendly with the Japs. The English believe anything a false witness says. Everyone knows that, of course, but the English.

"So, U Taw Sein got U Bya's office. He is a very smart man—he takes bribes with both hands. If he hasn't helped you, it's because he doesn't want to."

"If we had him here, do you think we could get the truth out of him?"

"We could, and perhaps we could not. But we don't have him here."

"We'll get him. It'll be easy, if you help me."

Maung Tin listened, and agreed to the plan.

CHAPTER V

THE CORPSE THAT WALKED

THE streets of Mogok were still empty when Finlay seated himself at the entrance of U Taw Sein's compound. Maung Tin went up the steps of the Deputy Assistant Commissioner's house, and called, with great show of self-importance, "Exalted and Holy One! A *pongyi* is outside. He asks me to say that Lu Sadaw wants to see you at the monastery, right away. It is important."

Inside, water splashed, and pots clattered. U Taw Sein, twisting his head-cloth into shape, came to the veranda. He was hardly more than half-awake, and not sure that he had rightly understood the summons.

"What's that, *kin-bya*? Lu Sadaw wants to see me at the monastery? But what about?"

"Do you think I was enough of a fool to ask the Exalted Personage who wanted me to call you? Do you suppose he asked Lu Sadaw?"

That set U Taw Sein back on his heels. No monk would dream of the discourtesy of asking his superior such a question.

Meanwhile, Finlay sat motionless, head inclined, bowl ready for any early passerby's offering. Since there were women in the official's house, a devout monk would not even set foot on the stairs, as such a move would for a moment put him below a woman. Neither would one of superior piety needlessly come too close to any place where women lived. So, beginning to realize that a model of devotion was at his gate, U Taw Sein was doubly impressed.

Maung Tin went on, ironically, "Wait, Exalted and Holy Builder of Pagodas, I'll run to the monastery and ask the abbot if he really does wish to see you. Perhaps he was dreaming."

"Don't be stupid, *kin-bya!*" Then, to the woman in the back room, "Never mind breakfast, I'll gain merit by not eating!"

When the stairs creaked under the Deputy Assistant Commissioner's weight, Finlay got up to head for the highway. As he walked along, he fingered a rosary.

Maung Tin overtook Finlay, made a *shiko*, asked him a question; then he raced back to the official. "Builder of Pagodas, the Great Glory says that if you wish to ride, it is well, but he wins further merit by walking."

U Taw Sein would much rather have built a pagoda than to walk to the monastery, yet it would be disrespectful to drive, and overtake the holy man whose vows required him to go afoot. He flung a two-anna piece to Maung Tin, and went puffing and sweating up the grade.

Half a mile from his supposed destination,

Finlay halted. Maung Tin closed in from the rear. They had U Taw Sein pocketed before he had a chance to be amazed. The "eater" whipped a loop over the man's head and pulled it tight, pinning his arms to his sides. Finlay said, "Don't yell, or he'll lop your head off."

U Taw Sein gaped. He sputtered, he protested, he broke out in a sweat which drenched his jacket and *longyi*. "What is this banditry? This is criminal. . . How dare you treat me this way. . ."

"When we get to where we're going, I'll tell you."

Maung Tin pointed out a path, and the three followed it.

After half an hour, they came to a clearing where a teak camp had once been. The ramshackle remains of a bungalow rose from the dry grass and weeds. Once indoors, they tied the prisoner to a chair.

Finlay said, "I want to know whose betel-nut box that was. You know, but you're protecting someone."

"I, shelter a *dacoit?* People saw me leave—there will be a search. If you release me, I'll protect you."

Maung Tin grinned evilly. "Builder of Pagodas, if anyone finds you, you won't be able to name either of us."

The fat man believed Maung Tin. He said, "It belongs to Hkin Ko, U Bya's one-time chief clerk. U Bya sent the *dacoit.*"

"And you'd protect *his* friends? After you swore him out of office, and made the English hate him?"

"Returning good for evil, he loved the Japs, but I forgive him," U Taw Sein declared, earnestly. "I rebuild harmony in the land. I lied when I denied knowing attacker's identity—my people would hate me for inciting English against indigenous resident. You were not hurt, he has reformed—forgive him."

"Let's go, Maung Tin," Finlay said. "In a couple of days, he'll be hungry enough to tell the truth."

They were halfway across the clearing when the prisoner yelled, "Come back, I tell you the whole truth now."

They returned. U Taw Sein said, "I was afraid. The man is Ko Shwe Yan. He is headman of Mr. Sinclair's teak loggers, but he is also friend of U Bya."

"You're a liar! Sinclair hasn't any loggers."

They came to a clearing where a teak camp had once been. The ramshackle remains of a bungalow rose from the dry grass and weeds.

"But now he has. He sent for men, for elephants, everything. Now let me go, I have proved good faith. I beg of you, do not let Mr. Sinclair know I exposed criminal employee."

Finlay, going out to ponder, took a good deal more time than needed. When he came back to the bungalow, he told the prisoner, "We're going to eat, but you're staying here. That's a wild yarn, Sinclair just now getting a crew."

"I promise no constabulary hunts you. Let me go."

"We're going to see Ko Shwe Yan. Maybe you're still lying."

SEVERAL of Maung Tin's "eaters" were posted to give warning, just in case there was a search for the missing Deputy Assistant Commissioner. One set out for the mine to get Jang Bahadur, who'd be a good man to take along that night in the raid to nab Sinclair's foreman.

Meanwhile, Finlay was worried from considering the chances that there'd be a widespread search for the captured official. Maung Tin, however, optimistically declared, "His family think U Taw Sein went to monastery to meditate. His office people, they think he is drinking too much rice brandy, smoking too much opium."

Maung Tin spent the day spying out Sinclair's teak camp. He came back to say that there were a few loggers, and at least two elephants. Finlay suspected that Sinclair had put in some window dressing to convince Nadine he'd been maligned.

That night, as they set out to collar Ko Shwe Yan, Finlay was more than ever convinced that the man he had pistol-whipped at the start of the *dacoit* raid would know something about Mohan Lal and the theft of the ruby, for that job had required too much arranging to be kept secret. Although the "eaters" had at the start been sullen and resentful, Maung Tin's help had cleared them of suspicion. Thus the attempted killing and Mohan Lal's trickery could hardly be other than successive moves of an effort to block Nadine's enterprise.

Jang Bahadur, who had arrived shortly after nightfall, agreed with the summing up. "Getting Ko Shwe Yan very good. I watch his face when he see U Taw Sein. Then we know who is damn liar."

Finlay and Jang waited outside the teak camp; trapping the headman was a task to be handled by Maung Tin and a few of his "eaters." "If anything gets loused up," he told Jang, "they can alibi out of it, and still have a chance for another play. But a monk and a Gurkha would set folks thinking."

So they listened to those who sang and those who gambled. A phonograph with a cracked record ground out *Beer Barrel Polka.*

Time dragged. Burmese mirth tapered off. Nothing had happened.

"Maybe Maung Tin is play *ko-mi.*"

"Funny then there've been no fights."

Then, when the camp was silent, the shacks were dark, and there was no light except in the bungalow where Sinclair made his headquarters, Jang nudged Finlay.

Blurred shapes rose out of the gloom. Maung Tin had returned, and with two prisoners. Both were kept throttled speechless and nearly unconscious by cord collars twisted tight at the nape of the neck.

When they had moved down the trail for perhaps a quarter of a mile, Maung Tin said, "Got Ko Shwe Yan, got Mohan Lal. Mohan Lal is the *sahib's* Mugh cook, not ruby buyer."

"You sure?"

"You look."

Jang had a flashlight. The leading captive was the Hindu thief. His eyes bulged like golf balls, partly from terror, and partly from incipient strangulation. His lips were slate gray, and his face was grayish green.

When Jang showed his teeth and fingered the edge of his *kukri,* Mohan Lal's legs buckled. They kicked him to his feet, and eased off just a bit on the garotte.

The camp headman, Ko Shwe Yan, was middle-aged and sweating. His face was now so distorted that Finlay could get no idea of his normal appearance.

"Hold it up a second. I want to make sure of something."

Mohan Lal's captors went on. Ko Shwe Yan's breath came in wheezing spurts. He collapsed. Finlay said, "Ease up a bit—we want him alive."

Maung Tin exclaimed, "That prove this man try for kill you. When he see your face, he get sick."

"He'd hardly know me, gotten up like a monk." Finlay took the flash, and knelt beside the captive, who seemed totally done in.

The captors, expecting unusual vengeance, squatted in a half-circle and craned their necks as Finlay directed the light with one hand and fingered Ko Shwe Yan's shoulder with the other.

"That does it! Here's where I bopped him with the gun!"

There was still a welt and a scarcely healed gash which the pistol sight had made. The "eaters" chattered excitedly. The situation was so full of promise that everyone, including Finlay, was caught off-guard. Without warning, Ko Shwe Yan came to a crouch which was prolonger into a lunge. The garotte had come loose. No one had been holding it. With a yell, he raced into the forest, whose every yard he knew from years of experience.

Pursuit was so hopeless that none was attempted.

However, since they still had Mohan Lal, the "eaters" were content, and so was Finlay; and they went on to the half-ruined bungalow.

ON reaching his destination, Finlay had another surprise: Nadine was waiting. "After Jang went to meet you at the monastery," she explained, "I began thinking it over, and when Ram said he'd show me the way, I told him to grab his rifle and trot along. And before we got to the monastery, one of Maung Tin's lookouts stopped us and said you'd be at this place, and brought us over."

"These fellows might've chopped you down before Ram could get in a word. Good Lord, woman, what's the idea?"

"It's you I'm worried about."

"All right. But sit tight, till we put Mohan Lal over the jumps."

He left her sitting on the floor of the front room, and went in to the two prisoners.

When the "eaters" had finished searching Mohan Lal, without result, Finlay said, "Tell me where the ruby is."

"I was robbed. That bungalow was a trap for me, for us all."

"Including a bladder of chicken blood to make it look as if your throat'd been cut?"

"I struck one of the assailants. His nose bled."

"A Mugh cook, offering a *lakh* of rupees!"

Mohal Lal, considering his bonds, did a good job of shrugging. "For me to come into this troubled district as a gem buyer, that would be dangerous. So I came as a cook."

Logical, but Finlay wasn't gulping it. "Try to convince Maung Tin's boys. You and Ko Shwe Yan and U Taw Sein—cook, camp foreman, and Deputy Assistant Commissioner—are all messed up in this. I've got enough of you to make it interesting."

The pudgy official was sweating and goggle-eyed. Mohan Lal saw a future as rough as it would be short. Finlay clinched it by telling him, "This is out of my hands. I couldn't save you from these 'eaters,' even if I wanted to. You'd better tell me where you hid the ruby."

"I don't know . . . what can I say? Let me think."

Finlay said to Maung Tin, "Let him think," and went to the front. The "eater" spoke to the guards, then followed.

Nadine asked, "Mike, must you go through with it? Mike—" Her challenging eyes wavered. "Let the constabulary settle this, legally. Let me notify Inspector Keane."

"That slick buzzard in there can make a fool of the law!"

"Then let him."

"You told me you didn't hold me responsible," Finlay said. "But I bungled, and I'm responsible to myself."

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A familiar voice came from the darkness, a voice so calm and serene Finlay was not startled or alarmed by having been caught off guard. "He is right, Miss Hudson," Lu Sadaw was saying. "The act is his—you cannot lift the weight of it from him." The abbot came in, still speaking. "Nor can you go from here and leave behind you the burden of your wishes, which led to these things tonight."

"There's no reason why I can't leave. I won't have a thing to do with what's coming."

"It is too late to go," Lu Sadaw told her. "You cannot avoid a share in what is coming. To think that one ever can cut one's self loose from the result of one's acts and wishes is delusion. Outside is danger which your man could not fight. . . I came to bring Mr. Finlay's clothes, particularly the shoes he left at the monastery."

"What's this?" Finlay demanded. "What's happening?"

The abbot offered him a bundle. "Since you left sanctuary to go back to the world of men and events, you must not wear the yellow robe. I noticed men surrounding the clearing. Armed men, speaking of attack. I slipped in, but could you slip out?"

Finlay, remembering the abbot's trick of removing his personality so that his presence was as that of a stump or a clod, understood what Lu Sadaw meant. He'd heard rangers tell how their success in bushwhacking Japanese sentries depended on refraining, during the final few yards of approach, from any thought about the job at hand; otherwise, the prospective victim would sense his danger.

"You're right," Finlay admitted. "I'll play it that way."

As he stepped into the prisoners' room to change back to shirt and pants and shoes, he was cursing the slip which had let Ko Shwe Yan make a break. The foreman's flight, he now realized, had led to a rescue party.

FINLAY had scarcely returned to the front when a rifle whacked. Firecrackers popped and blasted. The bolt of a crossbow made the abbot's robe ripple in passing. Finlay brushed Nadine clear of the entrance. Maung Tin slapped out the wick of the oil lamp. Ram Singh dropped to the floor to cover the entrance with his rifle.

Jang Bahadur found Finlay in the dark and laid a hand on his shoulder. "See now why Mohan Lal not tell? He knew help coming."

Ram shot at the flash of exploding firecrackers. Through a break in the wall, Finlay saw a man at the edge of the clearing spin and topple over.

"Lu Sadaw," he said to Nadine, who huddled close to him, "was right. Maung Tin's lookouts were either chopped down, or just by-passed. In that case, it's a cinch they're outnumbered and they'll play safe. No help there."

Then Jang suggested, "I go out, get Mr. Sinclair, Mr. Wilson, with guns, get all teak loggers. Can go like Lu Sadaw."

Ram Singh's shot, presently followed by Finlay's .45, made the raiders delay their rush. It was as if, having responded to an unexpected demand, they knew what they wanted to do but didn't know how. The moon, though not yet over the treetops, was lighting the clearing. Its glow reached in through the gaps of the roof.

Finlay turned to Maung Tin. "How about letting them have Mohan Lal? This proves they're working together, and you'll have another chance at him and Ko Shwe Yan."

"If U Taw Sein is what they come to get, then there is no getting away alive for us," the "eater" pointed out with unpleasantly sound logic. "He has *dacoit* friends."

There were more firecrackers to intimidate the besieged; then came the cough of home-made muzzle loaders, the twang of crossbows, and the howling of *dacoits* as they broke from cover, determined at last to charge.

One pistol and one rifle drove them back. Ram Singh, however, grimly eyed his remaining clip of cartridges. Finlay felt the same way about his extra clip of .45's. But he said, confidently, "A couple more shellackings'll take it out of them. Buck up, honey, we're not done yet."

Maung Tin went to threaten the prisoners with death unless they called off the attack. Finlay, watching the exchange, was puzzled by their faces and their voices. He came back, saying, "I don't make it. Mohan Lal's scared sick, but he shouldn't be, not if this is a rescue party for him."

"I still wish," Nadine said, "that you'd told Jang to find Inspector Keane."

"Before he could come down from Division Headquarters, we'll be finished, or we'll be all in the clear."

Another rush, and another. The last one broke at the veranda. Finlay cleared the doorway by pistol whipping a *dacoit* and snatching his chopper. Had the other raiders noted this, they'd have known that the last cartridge had been fired, and that they had the situation in hand.

Ram Singh, flexing his big hands, considered the Arisaka as a club. He grumbled, "No bayonet."

Finlay listened to the voices in the clearing. "Maung Tin, do you get any of it?"

The "eater" cocked his head. "Not liking come back."

Lu Sadaw finally spoke. "They will come back. A white man talks to them."

"*What?* It can't be!"

The abbot went to the gutted window. "Now

I see him. A good leader, a good soldier, he goes out ahead to show his men."

Finlay looked, and turned to catch Nadine's hand. "You tell me if I'm wacky!"

"Owen Sinclair!" She drew back from the sill. "Yes, it's Owen."

He was advancing across the clearing to show the *dacoits* that there was no more gunfire to be feared. All the contradictions which Mogok had offered became rational in the light of what Finlay now saw and heard.

"He can't know you're here," Nadine was saying. "If Ko Shwe Yan told him anything, he must have said that a monk was with some natives who nabbed him and Mohan Lal."

Reality returned to the moon-drenched clearing. Reasonably, the Englishman was leading in the rescue of two employees. Finlay leaned over the sill and shouted, "Hold it, Sinclair! Call them off!"

The man jerked as if stung, but he kept coming. He gestured to the *dacoits* who, though they had broken cover, were plainly hesitant from fear of a volley at close range.

"Sinclair! This is Finlay speaking! What the hell do you think you're doing?"

Sinclair staggered as another native slashed, and another.

No answer.

During Finlay's attempt at parley, Nadine had left the room. Stepping from the bungalow's shadow, she made directly for Sinclair.

"Why, Owen!" she exclaimed. "Just imagine meeting you here! Do come in."

CHAPTER VI

THE GATE OPENS

AMAZEMENT at the sight of Sinclair had kept Finlay from noticing Nadine's departure; and now the shock of seeing her accost the white leader of bandits left him confused. He wanted to run out to get her back to safety, yet her friendly tone and easy manner made him think, *He's crazy. If I go out now, there's no telling what he'll do before I can get at him!*

As though sensing his thought, Lu Sadaw said, "Stay here! This is more than you think. She is that man's fate, and there is no escape for him. He meets the result of all his past."

The line of *dacoits* had halted. Their choppers, and the heads of their lances twinkled in the moonlight. Sinclair finally croaked, "Nadine! My God . . . what . . . how . . ."

"I never dreamed you'd go as far as to rob me to make it look bad for Mike."

Sinclair recovered enough to laugh bitterly, the laugh of a man who realized that the biggest thing in his life was lost. There was no difference between weeping and such laughter.

"Very well. But I didn't send the man to kill him. U Taw Sein did that, to scare him out. I didn't take the ruby to rob you. I was jealous—"

"There was more than that to it, Owen. Those visits to see Lu Sadaw and learn about the Gates of the Law, and all the while trying to keep me from bothering. You don't own a teak lease—you don't even have an option."

"Eric—" he began, and stopped short.

"Leave Eric Wilson out of it. You were my brother's friend. What did he tell you about the mine, trusting you to tell me what he couldn't write on account of censorship?"

Sinclair almost answered, then froze up.

Her voice softened. "Do you want to finish me with these others you came to silence so they'd not expose you? Or do you think you can stop all this, and be Neil's friend again, the man he liked and trusted?"

"Rubies are trash—hardly worth the hunting"

Sinclair raised his bent arm as if to shut out the sight of her face, then he turned and ran. Finlay, released from the grip of the encounter, dashed out to the veranda, as if he could hasten Nadine's return to momentary safety.

She met him at the steps, and clung to him. What happened then at the edge of the clearing made him cry out. Sinclair, facing the *dacoits*, gestured and said, "Go back! It is over. Let them go!"

The nearest native screamed in fury, and slashed with his *dah*. Sinclair staggered. Another slashed, and another. He sank to his knees, and clawed the earth. They hacked, and hacked again, until they were sure that he could never betray them.

Finlay edged Nadine through the doorway. "We're next."

"They are afraid," the abbot agreed, "that he'd turn against them because of her."

When Maung Tin went to release the prisoners, and give them a chance for their lives, he saw that Mohan Lal was dead. Slugs from a muzzle-loader had finished him. U Taw Sein moaned, "And I also am wounded . . . I am bleeding!"

"Shut up, or you'll bleed some more!"

Finlay said, "We can use our choppers and hold them off till they get sick of it. Or, make a rush and cut through. They're spread out, the line's thin. What say?"

Ram Singh spoke first. "Cut through, *sahib*."

Maung Tin agreed, and so did the "eaters."

U Taw Sein was saying, over and over, "Mr. Finley, it was not my fault. How could I expose Mr. Sinclair's foreman, the servant of a powerful man? It was not my fault."

The raiders wriggled through the weeds, as though not yet convinced that the besieged were out of cartridges.

Finlay said, "Get set to jump off the veranda and head for the trail—it's over that way. Yell your heads off when you jump. Nadine, stick by me! Ram Singh, on the other side of her."

The abbot stepped aside. "I'll go alone. They'll recognize me, and they'll not touch me. And I should go first. A distraction, it may help you."

He stepped to the veranda, and went down the steps. Deliberately, he crossed the clearing. Moonlight plainly showed that his shoulder was bare, and that his robe was yellow.

Finlay, however, did not give the signal to rush. There was a crashing and crackling, a squeal, a hoarse trumpeting. An elephant lumbered into the clearing. The mahout gave queer, piping cries to urge the beast to a faster gait. The man sitting behind the driver yelled, and leveled a shotgun. He cut loose, as the nearest raiders popped up from the weeds to scatter like quail. The elephant driver reached back, snatched a shotgun, and set to work.

Stinging pellets completed the rout.

Jang Bahadur, borrowing a logging camp elephant, had teamed up with Eric Wilson to break the siege.

"Keep on our heels," the forestry officer called, "we'll hold them off if they come back. Make for the monastery—you'll be safe there!"

LU SADAW was waiting at the monastery entrance. "I hoped you would come here for sanctuary. Please step over to the light. I have something to show you."

They crowded about him and the novice who held the lamp. In the abbot's palm was a pigeon-blood ruby. Nadine cried, "Why—Lu Sadaw! That looks like mine!"

He nodded. "Mr. Sinclair had it. I doubled in behind the *dacoits* and looked. And took a shortcut, so I was here ahead of you. But you forget the important man, Mr. Wilson."

The District Forest Officer said, "Er . . . you mean Jang. It'd have been impossible without an elephant. When he couldn't find Sinclair, he came to me. And with Ko Shwe Yan involved, I couldn't trust any of the loggers. So we came alone."

Nadine fingered the ruby as if regaining it

had not been worth the trouble. "Eric, now that it's over, tell me about Owen."

Wilson looked embarrassed. "I was . . . fact is, I am in a frightfully awkward position. Please believe me, I didn't suspect what was behind it all—I thought that Owen's claiming he had a teak lease up here was for, ah, purely romantic purposes. Poor devil's finances were desperate. But I couldn't tell you that."

Finlay cut in. "I've got an idea. It may be wild, but—"

"Please tell us, Mr. Finlay," the abbot asked, and smiled as if he himself had the answer.

"Neil said the way to make the mine pay was to grab the first big find and get out. He intended to stick until the Japs were in sight, but he left with a couple days to spare. He came to see you, here. You were out. So, since he didn't work right to the last, he must have made some find himself. Something big, lying right at the surface."

"That," said Lu Sadaw, "is how this field was discovered, centuries ago, by accident."

"No miners, no 'eaters' to know of it. He couldn't risk carrying it with him, he couldn't risk mailing it. He was afraid to write Nadine any details. So he hid it in the safest place, a monastery. His friend, Sinclair, either knew or guessed, but couldn't figure out the Gates of the Law."

Silence.

Finlay's glance shifted from face to face. "Somebody laugh."

Lu Sadaw said, "It is not funny. I told Sinclair a Buddhist truth—that Amita Buddha, the Infinite Buddha, opens the Eighty-four Thousand Gates of the Law. I truthfully told you that *Na-Mo-O-Mi-To-Fuh* is a mystic phrase to open the Gates of the Law. That Chinese phrase invokes the Infinite Buddha. The one we serve, the one whose images are in so many niches in those pagodas and under the *pyathat,* those are of the Buddha Guatama, the Buddha of this cycle. Day and night, we watched to see which of you knew where to look.

"Sinclair lied to me, you did not. Miss Hudson, if you had asked me yourself, I would have told you. But it is better as it is, for learning the difference between your two friends is more important than what your brother hid—or may have hid."

"Come, let us look."

"Then you don't know?" Finlay demanded.

He led the way to the pagoda which Neil had built. Slowly, he circled it. He stopped at a niche and pointed at the inscription beneath the enshrined image. "This Pali text is the sacred phrase to open the Gates of the Law."

He spoke to a novice, who pried at the image. When it was removed from its bed, the old man reached into the crypt and brought out a ruby!

"A little smaller than what you discovered, but well worth your brother's care. Though rubies are trash, hardly worth the hunting."

"He's right," Finlay said. "Sinclair, poor devil, proved that. What'll you do with it?"

"Build a pagoda, a great big one," she answered. "We're going home, Mike. Dad's future's all fixed up, everything's all figured out."

"Except you," Finlay told her. "You'll still be a problem."

"Oh, but I won't be. And if I am, that's your look-out. And if there's not enough gas to get to the coast, we'll ride that elephant."

THE ANCIENT ALLAN

By H. Rider Haggard

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Singletrack's wife was always opening her mouth to speak but seldom got a word out because of the steady, even flow of her spouse's conversation.

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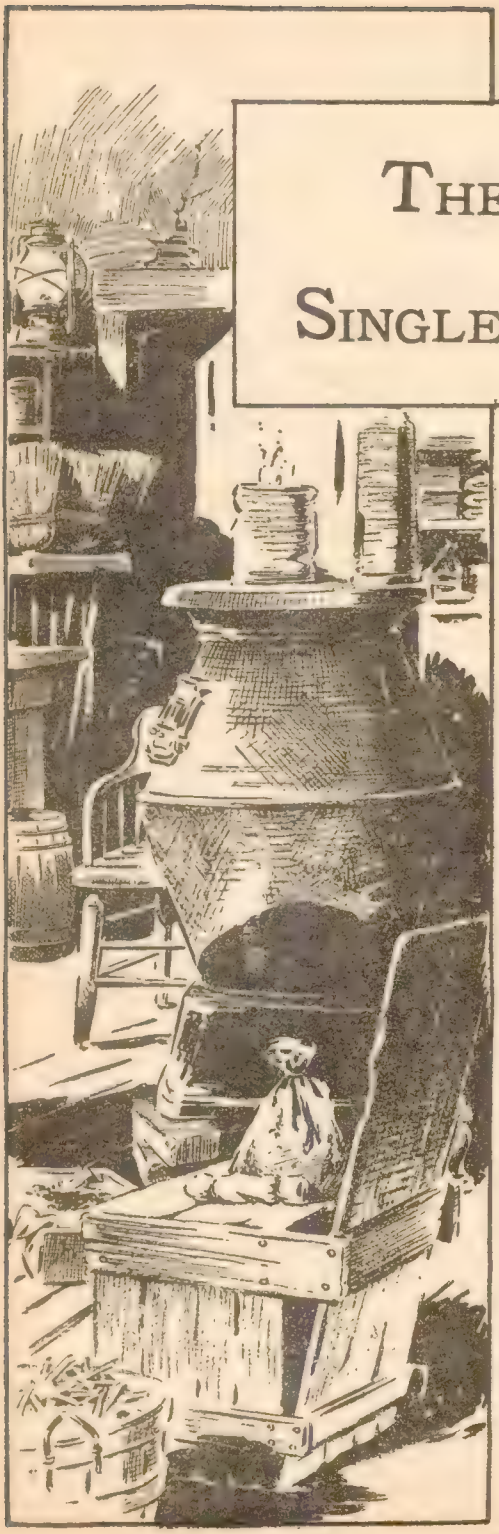

THE TESTIMONY OF SINGLETRACK SIMPSON

By
HECTOR CHEVIGNY

"SO me and the wife, we decided to come on into town day ahead of time, bein' as how we're guests of the county, as ya might say. M'wife, she kinda wanted to see what the inside of a hotel looked like again."

Mrs. Simpson, standing beside her husband, nodded vigorously. Frank Pees, the storekeeper, nodded, too. He knew better than to interrupt the speaker at the wrong moment. Singletrack Simpson got confused easily, and an ill-timed interruption only made him start all over again.

"She was in one once back in 'Fourteen," Singletrack said. "That was down in Walla Walla. County sure ain't stingy. We got two beds in our room." He smiled at the storekeeper, exposing his gums. "Two beds," he emphasized. "We figured out that was one apiece!" This was evidently the climax of his narration, which had been trailing on for some five minutes now.

The storekeeper dutifully shook his head in wonderment. The speaker was a tall, gaunt man whose face bore the somewhat vacant ex-

pression peculiar to those who have been trying for years to raise apples on unirrigated soil. Okanomac County had long since forgotten his true name, and his own wife referred to him as Singletrack. She was a small, bird-like creature who was always opening her mouth as if to speak but who seldom had a chance to get anything out because of the steady, even flow of her spouse's conversation. The most she usually contributed was a vigorous nod of the head in agreement with her husband.

As befitted their importance in the events about to take place in Okanomac, the old couple had put on their best. She wore a carefully pressed salmon-bright shirtwaist of silk. On her head, a small hat with a black ostrich feather bobbed rapidly each time she nodded. Her feet were encased in a pair of white pumps, on the heels of which she teetered uncertainly. Singletrack's raiment was more conservative; a brown four-in-hand held his blue work shirt closed at the throat and a newly pressed serge suit had replaced his customary overalls.

"Well, be seein' ya in court, Frank," he said, extending his hand to the storekeeper. The gesture had the faintest trace of condescension. "Hope it ain't against the rules to drop in and say hello to somebody who's goin' to be on the jury."

The storekeeper spit out a piece of the match he was chewing. "All I've got's the summons," he said, shortly. "Won't know till tomorrow morning if I'll be on it."

"It's two dollars a day, they say," put in Mrs. Simpson, brightly. She glanced at her husband as if for confirmation of this fact and her smile faded at his disapproving look. "Well, ain't it?" she asked. Singletrack drew a long breath; evidently a new subject had occurred to him. "Reminds me of the time me an' Maccabee Pritchard—he's one of the Pritchards from down around Entiat, the one married the Hobart girl back in '24—me and Maccabee we—"

The storekeeper hurriedly came to life. "Glad ya dropped in, folks. Got a couple salesmen comin' in today from the city and I better get my stock checked or I won't get a chance till the trial's over—not if they pick me for the jury. So long, see ya in court." He was very firm with his handshake and led Singletrack, at the same time, toward the screen door that opened to the covered porch in front of the store.

The Simpsons were not abashed; they were used to this mode of farewell. They said goodbye again, Mrs. Simpson's hat-feather bobbing with each word of her husband, and Frank Pees sighed with relief as they finally departed up the sidewalk. Halfway up the block, in front of Nelson's Hardware and Feed Depot, he saw them hesitate, debate momentarily, then enter. Obviously they were making the most of their sudden elevation to public life in Okanomac.

Frank Pees shifted his gaze further up the street to the county courthouse. It was a large white-pillared structure with a well-kept lawn and several fine old locust trees. Groups of men stood on the steps talking, and at the curb were parked half-a-dozen automobiles of a newness and make unusual in this part of the central Washington apple country. Frank noticed the fact with interest; last time he had looked, those cars had been in front of the hotel, three blocks down the street in the other direction. He grunted; evidently those Seattle attorneys brought in by the defense didn't do any walking at all. He wondered which of the fine cars was said to belong to that doctor who had come from San Francisco to testify.

Murder trials were not very frequent in Okanomac County. Now and then a farmer up in the hills lost his temper at the moment he happened to be wielding a pitchfork, or there was a killing among the itinerant apple pickers when they came to town in the fall, but never before had there been a trial of the magnitude of the one scheduled to open the following day. Some of his fellow townsmen deemed all the excitement good for business, but Frank didn't agree; in the long run it would cost the county more than it would bring in, he was willing to bet.

A couple of rich young fellows from San Francisco had gone up the Okanogan for some hunting. One had shot the other in self-defense, Frank had heard they would say at the trial. He had tried not to listen to too much of the talk because he was a conscientious man and he knew he should have no preconceived opinions if he was going to serve on the jury. The young fellow accused of doing the murder had been in jail since fall. Judge Bixby would have heard the case fast enough, but the young fellow's family apparently hadn't thought he ought to go on trial until they could get all those attorneys and that doctor together for it. The town was saying that it sounded as if the young fellow's family was afraid he'd need a lot of help.

The screen door behind him slammed. Martha stood beside him. "They gone?"

He nodded. His wife pursed her lips and followed his gaze to the courthouse. She must have divined his thoughts, for she said, "They're goin' to have a picnic down there, with a man like Singletrack the only witness to the shootin'."

"Won't be no picnic for me," he said bitterly.

"Maybe you'll be excused."

"And maybe I won't, too. They had a hard time diggin' up enough names for a jury, as it is." He considered this. He'd had things all fixed to take his first vacation in two years. He and Will Nelson, they'd planned to do a little fishing up the Stehekin. Later wouldn't do. "Think I'd better tell Will to go on," he said at last.

His wife regarded him with concern. She knew better than to suggest he try to get out of it. He could if he wanted to, she knew. Judge Bixby was his friend. But Frank wasn't the kind who would even try.

"Better get that stock checked, then, so's I'll know what to say to the salesmen while I'm takin' care of things," she said.

He nodded and slowly turned to re-enter the store.

EVERY window in Judge Bixby's courtroom was open, but it didn't help much. Frank Pees sat with his eleven fellow townsmen in the jury box, his knees jammed against the man in front of him, and fought hard to keep awake.

Picking the jury had taken two days. Left to his own devices, the prosecutor, who had been an Okanomac boy and knew everybody, could have done it in an hour, but no doubt he'd had to keep up his own end against the visitors. He was up there now, before Judge Bixby, arguing some point with the attorney the defense had brought from Spokane while proceedings lagged. It's hard when you're on a jury to keep from staring at the man whose life you may have to decide to end. Frank wondered how old the accused was—probably about thirty, though you couldn't be sure. His wife sat beside him. She was a pretty girl but, like her husband, had the look of too much money and too much crowded living. The two of them sat there together, both a little pale, but showing no emotion. Frank felt a twinge of dislike for them; why couldn't that young fellow, if he had to get in trouble, do it closer to his own home instead of putting the people of Okanomac to all this trouble? But he put this thought from him. A man can get into trouble anywhere; the fact that the man is a stranger entitles him to no less justice. His face looked as if he might have a temper at that, though. The prosecutor had pieced together some ugly story about jealousy and this young fellow arranging the hunting trip with his friend so that he might have an excuse for shooting him. Frank closed his eyes. He mustn't judge by appearances, he told himself. The defense claimed that he had shot in self-protection. Well, nobody would know for sure until Singletrack Simpson testified. Until then, it was all just legal show. Frank thought of the icy Stehekin river in which he could now have been fishing with Will Nelson and sighed. . . .

"Mortimer Simpson take the stand," bawled the bailiff. Frank jerked open his eyes and saw with surprise that the clock above Judge Bixby's head showed it was well after four. Laughter, quieted by the gavel, swept the crowded spectators' section for the first time; the amusement was for the discovery of the witness' true name.

Singletrack had been dozing, too. His wife poked him, sharply. "That's you," she was heard to say. He got up from his chair as if shot from behind and started hurriedly for the witness stand. He pulled down his cuffs, waved at the spectators and grinned. "Take the stand," said the bailiff, hurriedly. When the witness looked blankly at him, the bailiff took his arm, led him firmly to the witness chair, forcibly took his right hand and placed it on the Bible. "D'you sol'ly swear t'tel truth wholetruth noth' but th' truth, s'help y'God?"

"Huh?" asked Singletrack, doubtfully.

"Thanks," said the bailiff, who snapped the Bible shut and stalked back to his accustomed place.

The chief attorney for the defense rose from his chair beside one of the littered tables and advanced to the witness. He was supposed to be one of the ablest criminal lawyers in the State

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of Washington; the rumor was that he was costing the family of the young man who sat on trial for his life two hundred dollars a day. Frank Pees had discounted that figure when he heard it, but he knew that the man wasn't coming cheap. His name was J. Francis Mulroney and his voice, when it came, was mellow and resonant. "What is your name?" he began pleasantly.

Singletrack seemed to expect the question. He leaned forward, his elbows on his knees, and took a breath—one long enough to last for some time. "Well, sir, my mother—"

Mr. Mulroney smiled encouragingly. "Your occupation?" The witness looked at him shrewdly. "Thought you wanted to know my name."

"You are an orchardist, are you not?"

The witness looked disappointed; he had wanted to get out those facts about his name. "I guess so," he admitted. "Leastways, we do grow a few apples—"

"Where is your farm located, Mr. Simpson?"

The witness grinned and drew another long breath. "Well, sir, you take that road that leads out of Okanomac here, see, the one to the west. After you get across the bridge—"

"Your farm is located up in the hills a few miles east of Okanogan Lake, I believe, is it not?" The witness looked at the attorney with dislike. "I was just tellin' you—"

"Very good, very good indeed," said Mr. Mulroney, genially. Light laughter passed over the spectators. The witness took it to be at his questioner's expense and waved a hand. Judge Bixby picked up his gavel, opened his mouth, then thought better of it and said nothing. The jury, as one man, now leaned forward. Mr. Mulroney looked over the courtroom, cleared his throat, smiled; his expression indicated that these back country witnesses were nothing, nothing. "Now, Mr. Simpson," he said, putting his thumbs in his belt, "suppose you tell us, in your own words, what you saw and heard the afternoon of October twenty-seventh."

There was a little gasp from the crowd; even Judge Bixby blew his lips with surprise. Mr. Mulroney couldn't have made a worse mistake. The witness adjusted himself carefully in the chair, drew another long breath. "Well, sir, we got an old barn down in the corner of the south forty that kinda kilters over because the termites got at the foundations We don't use it much except to keep old boxes in and truck like that, but I been aimin' to fix it fer a long time. So, one day when my cousin Dillard Weems—he's the one married that Kingdon girl from Republic—one day when he come over in his buckboard and said he was goin' up to Ross Brattain's place, I said maybe Ross's got a jack I kin borrow—"

The county prosecutor got slowly to his feet. "Sure hate to do it, Judge," he said, "but I've got to object. Irrelevant and immaterial."

THE interruption caused Singletrack to stop, mouth open. He swallowed, seemed about to resume, but remained silent at a gesture of the defense attorney.

Judge Bixby said, "Sustained," and waited for the Seattle criminal lawyer to make the next move. Mr. Mulroney's confident smile did not fade. He turned to the witness, smoothly. "Suppose, Mr. Simpson, you tell the gentlemen of the jury the essential facts—and only the essential facts."

The witness glared at his questioner. "That's what I'm aimin' to do." He cleared his throat. "Well, sir, we got an old barn down in the corner of the south forty that kinda kilters over because termites got at the foundation. We don't use it much except to keep old boxes in and truck like that, but I been aimin' to fix it for a long time. So, one day when my cousin Dillard Weems—"

The prosecutor again rose to his feet. "Object. Same grounds."

Judge Bixby looked over his spectacles at Mr. Mulroney. "Haven't you instructed your witness in the proper manner of presenting evidence?"

Mr. Mulroney's smile seemed as confident as ever. "I have, Your Honor, but—"

Judge Bixby cut in, "Your practice has been limited to the metropolitan bar, has it not, Mr. Mulroney?"

"Well, now, I'm not sure the word is 'limited', but if Your Honor wishes to ascertain my knowledge of court procedure—"

"I'm interested only in seeing that the taxpayers of this county won't have to bear the burden of this trial indefinitely," snapped the judge. He looked at the prosecutor. "I see that certain mannerisms of speech peculiar to this witness are as well-known to you as they are to me. I do not intend to see them taken advantage of in order to prolong the trial and get the witness so badly confused he won't be able to get out his story at all. Until the witness does not continue to tell what he himself heard and saw, I will sustain no further objections."

The prosecutor advanced quickly to the bench. "Your Honor, the rules of evidence—"

"I may be trusted to arbitrate the rules of evidence. If further interruptions occur without good reason, I may even hold the party in contempt. Proceed, Mr. Mulroney."

"Thank you, Your Honor." The attorney turned back to his witness. "There you are, Mr. Simpson," he said, heartily, "carte blanche to tell your own story."

"Huh?" asked Singletrack, suspiciously.

"That means just take your time—only be sure that you tell only what you yourself heard or saw."

Sitting among his fellow jurors, Frank Pees moved uncomfortably on his hard chair and

sighed; he knew that if the prosecutor found no ground to interrupt, Judge Bixby wouldn't adjourn court until the story was out once and for all. To expect Singletrack to resume the next day where he had been made to stop was too much.

The witness had now taken his customary long breath and finally had started again. He got a little further this time. "—so Cousin Dillard says, 'Sure, I'll take you up to Ross Brattain's place.' So I got in Cousin Dillard's buckboard and we started out. That was around ten in the morning, near as I kin remember. Ross's place is up five, six miles the other side of the river. We crossed the bridge and—"

"What river?" asked Mr. Mulroney.

The witness stared at him in astonishment. "Come again?"

"What river was that?" repeated Mr. Mulroney, his face reddening. Possibly he realized his mistake, though too late. The prosecutor, doodling on some papers very fast, chuckled audibly. The jury sighed. Judge Bixby blew out his cheeks. The witness knit his brows in an effort to remember what he'd been saying. "Lessee, where was I?"

"You and your cousin were crossing the river—the Okanogan River, isn't it?"

The witness shook his head, took another long breath. "Well, sir, we got an old barn down in the corner of the south forty that kinda kilters over because termites got in the foundation—"

Judge Bixby brought down his gavel in exasperation. "That will do for today," he stated. Glaring at the bailiff, he instructed him to see that the jurymen were taken to their quarters at the hotel, and retired to his chambers, slamming the door behind him.

FRANK PEES slid down as far as he could in the hard chair and yawned wearily. It was going to be another scorcher of a day. Frank couldn't remember when he had spent a less comfortable night than he had on the hard beds of Okanomac's one hotel. Everybody's temper was short, even Judge Bixby had taken his place that morning in notably bad humor. Apparently the attorneys for the defense had had a fight among themselves, for when Singletrack was put back on the stand, Mr. Mulroney did not resume questioning. Instead, a small, brittle little man with the look of a professor and wearing pince nez had risen from the defense table. Frank had heard he was the brains behind the defense. Certainly he did not have the air of a trial lawyer. He struck no attitude with Singletrack but began at once in a dry, even tone. "All right, Mr. Simpson, by now I am sure you know what to do. Will you give us your testimony again, please."

Singletrack looked haggard. His air of confidence was gone and he carefully avoided looking either at his wife or the spectators as he took his customary long breath to begin. "Well, sir, we got an old barn down in the corner of the south forty that kinda kilters over because termites got in the foundation—"

Frank Pees closed his eyes and prayed that no one would interrupt. Usually it took Singletrack an hour. "—so when my cousin, Dillard Weems—he's the one married to that Kingdon girl from Republic—" Frank's gaze wandered again to the young man who sat there in the chair of the accused with his young wife beside him. There was nothing funny in it

"Well, sir, we got an old barn down in the corner of the south forty that kinda kilters over..."

for him, Frank thought—though you couldn't tell what he was thinking by looking at him. His wife was beginning to look a little peaked. The young man made one of the rare movements Frank had seen; his hand slid to her lap and grasped hers. Her knuckles showed white as she gripped it. Frank jerked his eyes to the battery of expensive attorneys. They were sitting tensely listening to the witness; their colleague had drawn back from the witness chair as if anxious not to distract him in the slightest. Singletrack was sweating as he talked and the words were now coming in a rapid torrent that kept the single court reporter glued to his papers. "—so after we got across the bridge, we took the short cut through the woods up to Brattain's orchard. Right along that road's where Amos Bradish keeps that place he calls a huntin' lodge. Rents it to rich folks when they come up for huntin' or fishin'. Well, I kinda wanted to see Amos, so I told Cousin Dillard to take the buckboard down the road a piece while I stopped in—"

Frank's dawdling glance had been resting on a fleshy, professional looking man who sat among the witnesses. This was the psychiatrist who could be counted on to testify, if things didn't look good for the accused, that the boy'd been too jealous to know what he was doing, or something. Frank wondered how much he was getting a day for sitting there. Anyway you figured it, it was costing somebody a lot of money.

"—I'd seen them two young fellers before," Singletrack was going on—"the ones Amos had stayin' at the place at the time. Talked to the one that got killed once. He was the one with the yeller hair—I remember him becuz my wife's brother got hair just like he had—that's Abel Price, runs a feed store in Wenatchee. Well, sir, he—the one with the yeller hair—he was standin' on the porch of Amos's place with a twelve-gauge shotgun and lookin' like he wasn't glad to see me. I asked him where Amos was and he said, 'Amos is gone into town for the mail.' So I said, 'Thank you very much,' and started back to where Cousin Dillard had the buckboard. Then I thought to myself, that's funny, Amos don't go to town for his mail except on Thursday. Anyway, that young feller talked awful queer, like he was chokin' or somethin'. Kinda wondered why he had the shotgun, too—bein' as how he had his city clothes on. Don't know exactly why I done it myself, but I circled back through the orchard toward the rear of Amos's place and I saw the young feller again—the one with the shotgun. The other young feller—that one settin' over there"—the witness indicated the accused—"he was perched on a stump cleanin' some fish. Didn't hear the other one come toward 'im at all. Leastwise he didn't give no sign." Singletrack stopped and wiped the perspiration from his brow on the sleeve of his coat.

The courtroom was perfectly still. The witness went on. "The young feller with the gun was weavin' a little bit, like he was drunk. Heard the two of them did quite a bit of drinkin'. Amos told me they brought up a whole case of whiskey with 'em when—" Singletrack broke off, startled.

"I object!" The prosecutor jumped up. "The witness is giving hearsay evidence now."

"Sustained," said Judge Bixby, disgustedly.

Singletrack Simpson looked dazed. "Aw shucks, I'd almost finished."

The little attorney put a hand quickly on his arm. "You were saying, Mr. Simpson, that you saw the young chap with the yellow hair approach the accused with a shotgun. What did you see or hear next?"

"Huh?" asked Singletrack.

"Go on from where you left off."

"Oh. Well, lessee, now. Where did I leave off?" He knit his brows and plucked nervously at a button on his shirt. Suddenly his face cleared and he smiled. "Well, here's what happened. We got an old barn down in the corner of the south forty. All we use it for—"

A LONG sigh went up from the hot, close courtroom. Frank looked quickly at the accused. The young fellow sat as if cut from stone. The strain was telling on his wife, though. She sat staring at the witness, her face the color of wax. That girl might faint, if things didn't let up, Frank thought. That might be the next interruption Singletrack would get. But this time it was Judge Bixby who stopped the witness. He brought his gavel down firmly in the middle of one of Singletrack's sentences and said, drily, "Surely this array of learned counsel can figure out some way to get this witness to present his evidence in a form the court can accept." He glanced toward the psychiatrist. "Perhaps someone versed in psychology or the other learned sciences could be called in to assist you." He waited, but none of the attorneys had an answer. Judge Bixby threw down his gavel, pursed his cheeks with exasperation and took thought on his own. Had this been a federal court, he could have managed to get Singletrack's story out of him himself. But the state laws tied his hands in the degree to which, as a judge, he could comment on the evidence.

The defense attorney spoke up. "Perhaps, sir, a recess in which we could confer—"

"Granted," answered Judge Bixby, irritably.

To his own amazement, Frank Pees found himself getting to his feet. "Excuse me, Judge, can I butt in here?" He saw every eye in the place turn to him in surprise, those of the counsel for the defense expressing also dismay. Judge Bixby's voice, though, showed relief. "You have a question, Mr. Pees?"

"Well, it ain't exactly a question, Judge. It's

just that I've known Singletrack Simpson a good many years and I think I know how to get him to the point," he heard himself say.

The light laughter from the spectators was immediately quieted by Judge Bixby. "All right, Mr. Pees, let's see you try."

"Yes, sir." Frank found himself stumbling past the knees of his fellow jurors and opening the door to the box. The defense attorneys, he saw, were looking uncertainly at each other. Perhaps the prosecutor had been dozing, for not until Frank was in front of the bench did he jump to his feet.

"Your Honor, this is irregular and—"

"Any member of the jury may ask a question, according to the laws of this state," snapped Bixby.

"Sure, but it's got to be a question. The juror himself stated—"

Judge Bixby brought down his gavel. "Objection overruled." He gave Frank a long look. There was the slightest possible lowering of the right eye-lid as he did so. His tone was brusque, though, as he said, "Remarks made by a juror in court must be guided by the same proprieties as those guiding counsel. Is that clear, Mr. Pees?"

"Well, now," answered Frank, "I don't know. What I was aimin' to do was tell a story. Is that all right?"

Bixby hesitated. Frank returned his stare and dropped his own eye-lid slightly. "Proceed," said His Honor, gruffly.

"Well, it seems pretty certain that this witness has an old barn down in the corner of the south forty that kinda kilters over because termites got at the foundation." Even the defense attorneys joined in the laugh. Judge Bixby pounded his desk. When silence returned, Frank continued: "And he'd been aimin' to fix it for a long time. So when his cousin, Dillard Weems came by one day in a buckboard on his way to Ross Brattain's, who is known to own a jack, Singletrack figured he might as well get a ride up there to borrow it." Frank hesitated and glanced at the man in the witness chair; he was nodding his head vigorously. "To get to Brattain's place they took a short cut through the woods along Okanogan Lake, past the hunting lodge maintained by Amos Bradish. Singletrack wanted to see Amos, so he got out of the buckboard telling his cousin to wait for him further down the road. He encountered one of Mr. Bradish's guests holding a twelve-gauge shotgun and who told Singletrack that Bradish was away. Singletrack started off, but something in the man's attitude caused him to circle back, unobserved, to see what was brewin'."

"That's it, that's the way it was," exclaimed Singletrack, waving his hands excitedly.

"The other guest, he saw, was sitting on a stump in back of the lodge cleaning some fish. The man with the shotgun approached him as if trying not to attract attention." Frank hesitated again, glanced toward the witness. Singletrack sat tensely, his face eager. Frank went on; he felt suddenly cold as he realized fully what he was about to do. This was where Singletrack had stopped. He hoped he wasn't walking into some legal technicality that would cause Singletrack's testimony to be thrown out completely. Well, he'd started this now. The rest had to be guess-work. "The man with the shotgun looked to Singletrack like he was drunk. The man on the stump

happened to look up, saw him and jumped up."

"That's what he did," agreed Singletrack.

"He wanted to know what his friend was doin' with the shotgun."

"He didn't, neither," Singletrack broke in. "He said, 'Oh, go and sober up, you damn fool!' "

FRANK pretended not to notice the correction. He was feeling very cold now. "But the friend paid no attention. He leveled the shotgun. Seeing he was serious, the other man made a lunge for the weapon. He succeeded in grabbing it, but couldn't get it away from the other man. They fought—"

"Not right away, they didn't. There was some more talk, first. Then that one"—Singletrack pointed to the accused—"brought up his fist with an uppercut that knocked the other one sprawlin'. Quick as a weasel, he got the shotgun out of his hands and stood off, warnin' the other one not to come no closer. But the other one got right up and came for him, his arms just flailin', so the young feller had to let him have it right in the chest." The witness stopped, wiped his dripping forehead.

"Well," said Frank Pees to Judge Bixby, "I guess that about winds up the story I wanted to tell." Turning, he sought the door to the jury box and resumed his seat. The attorneys could fight over the rest of it.

They did. The prosecutor was again on his feet vigorously attacking the admissability of the evidence thus finally, and at long last, extracted from Singletrack Simpson. "But did you hear the witness tell anything other than what he himself heard and saw?" Judge Bixby interposed.

"That isn't the point, Your Honor. In a court of law—"

"The objection," broke in Judge Bixby clearly, "is overruled." He nodded to the little defense attorney. "Have you any further questions of the witness?"

All through this unusual procedure, the attorney with the pince nez, like his colleagues, had stood as if paralyzed. He sprang to attention now and addressed the witness. "And that's what happened the afternoon of October twenty-seventh?" The witness nodded. "Why didn't you say so in the first place?"

"Gol ding it, that's what I've been tryin' to do fer two days."

"After you saw my client shoot and kill the other man clearly in self-defense, what did you do? Did you speak to him or did you go on to join your cousin?"

"My cousin?" asked Singletrack, surprised.

"Certainly, your cousin, Dillard Weems."

"Lessee, my cousin, Dillard." Singletrack snapped his fingers, "Oh, sure, here's how Dillard comes in. We got an old barn in the corner of the south forty that kinda kilters over—"

Judge Bixby broke his gavel.

SNOW lay pretty thick on Okaomac County. It felt good to warm your hands at the stove in Frank Pees store. "—well, sir, them lawyers tried every way they could to keep me from talkin'. They was costin' that young feller's dad three or four hundred dollars a day and they knew a good thing when they saw it." Singletrack had to pause and take on breath. His wife saw her opportunity.

"We voted against that prosecutor this fall, too," she cut in. "He wuz as bad as they wuz." Mrs. Simpson turned brightly to the storekeeper. "You were on the jury, remember—"

Singletrack scowled at his wife. "Now you made me fergit where I was. Lessee now." He knit his brows. She had stopped and closed her mouth. Suddenly his face cleared. "Well, sir, it was back in August when we came into town and stayed at the hotel, bein' as how we was guests of the county, as ya might say. I knowed right away that them there lawyers was out after the gravy."

Frank Pees chewed a match speculatively and listened to his callers with half an ear. The Simpsons had come into town for their December shopping. "Course, I was cuttin' off my nose to spite my face, in a way, when you think on it, tryin' to tell what I know and get it over with. You don't just find two dollars a day—"

The story, Frank knew, was now good for years. Very casually he broke in: "Couple came down from your way to do some buyin' in town today." Singletrack broke off in the middle of his sentence and looked eager. The storekeeper stared over their heads and continued: "Did quite a lot of buyin'. Couple hundred pounds of Gold Medal, sack of sugar, fifty pounds of them new limas we just got in—" His glance wandered momentarily to Singletrack who had nodded at each item. "I threw in a dozen cans of beans." Instead of nodding, Singletrack shook his head at this and Frank hurriedly amended: "They didn't want them either. Got a new line of canned noodles in, though, and they thought a couple of jars of them would go good for a change. Let's see, now. I got the list of what they bought right here somewhere." The storekeeper walked to his cash register, picked up a blank slip of paper and peered at it. "Says here, twenty-five pounds of coffee, five gallons of kerosene, a bucket of lard—"

"We got lard," put in Mrs. Simpson, quickly.

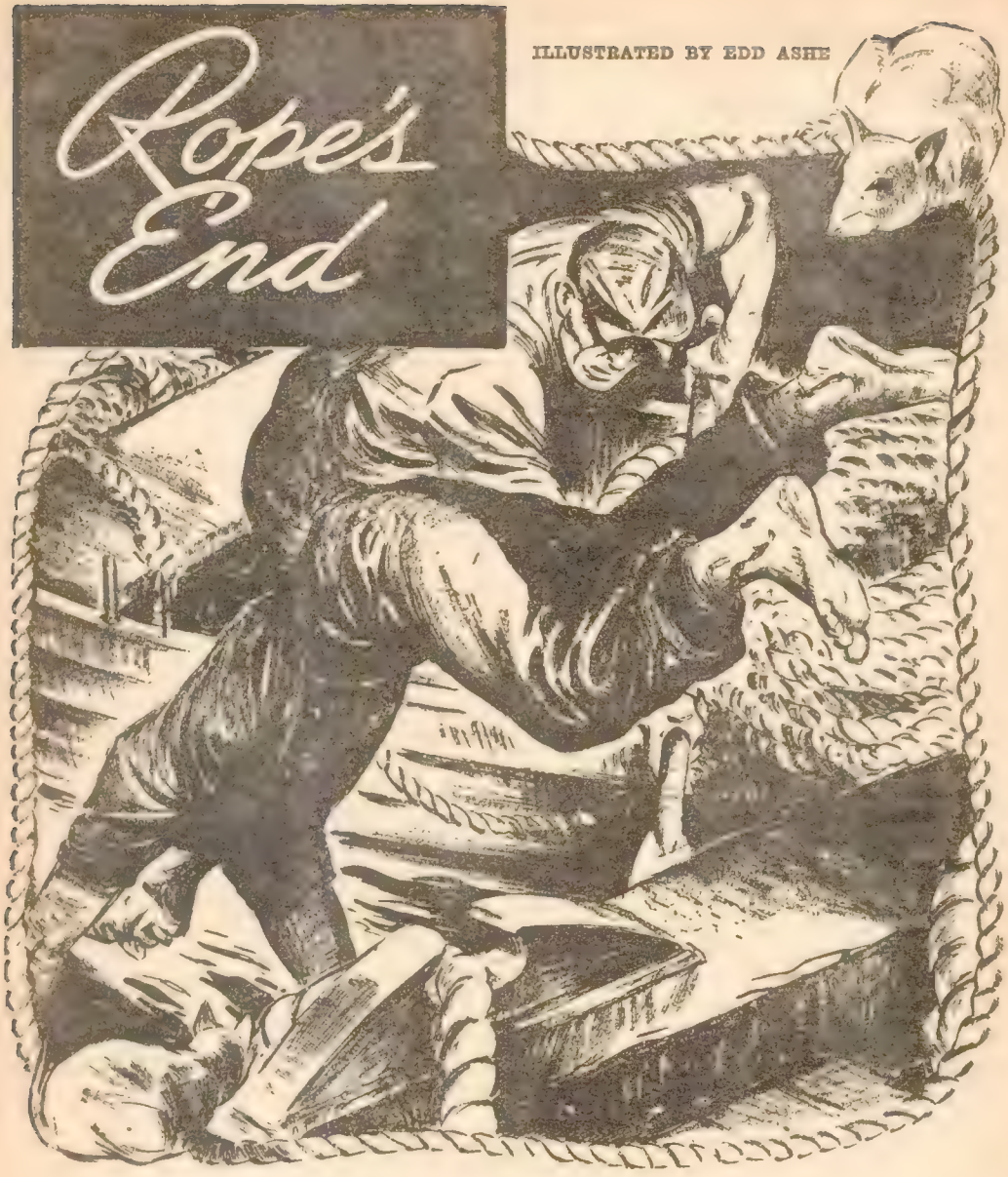
Her husband glared at her. "Mr. Pees is talking," he said severely. She looked abashed.

Singletrack drew a long breath. "Speakin' of lard," he began, "we had to butcher a hog up on the place. It was a shoat give me by my wife's brother—that's the one lives up the Methow Valley. Well, sir—"

Frank Pees was moving about the store gathering the items they had ordered.

Rope's End

ILLUSTRATED BY EDD ASHE



When his gun began to bark I didn't hang around none. I just jumped and hit the water head-on.

By

RAYMOND S.

SPEARS

"REDLEGS!" Pless Divver said to me. "We need handy-lines for our shanty-boats. A launch, or a barge or a string of rafted logs is liable to come down in the drift, and how would we swing 'em into the eddy?"

"I've been sore ever since the Government made me pay income tax on my moonshine bootlegging!" I assured him. "No better place

I can think of to get good rope than off'n a Mississippi Commission workings."

"Down to Look Across Neck they're revetting nine thousand feet of the river bank so the current won't cave in a cut-off," Pless declared, he being one of those keep-track fellows, knowing the answers, where and when.

Ever since Pless and me come out of Leavenworth we'd rubbed the Bottoms for our livings, from above K.C., clear down Chafelli. Taking every third landing down, two years to a trip, after three trips we could work the same tie-ins. Nobody would remember us after six years, except where we had a serious difficulty and were likely to be remembered.

Junking, patent medicines, cistern cleaning, barbering, blockade running, pecans, turtles, feathers—we had lots of main and side lines. Now we didn't feel right, not having five hundred feet of half-inch handy-line. Even if we'd had spare money for buying a thousand feet of light rope, it'd been extravagant buying, when all you needed was a heavy percentage of good luck. Of course, Government Works with lots of inducements hire a mean class for watchmen to pester around the big temptations.

So we floated down the current close into shore, first around Lost Water, then across Snaggy Ridge Bend, and all that late evening we didn't see a soul, trippers, fishermen, nor Swamp Angels. Pless sure bragged the loneliness. Come dark, and the lower ten miles we didn't even smoke.

The night chilled and up-boiled a fog. Black murk is a river man's best friend, if he knows how to use it. Around the point, we had to drop a sinker to drag on the bottom so we'd know which way we was going, down river or up a reverse-eddy. Long before we reached Uncle Sam's barges, we heard the gurgling suck of water through the barge fleet. If any one drawed under those overhangs he was sure a good-by goner! The sound always makes me shiver! But we come down well outside and side-slipped over to the long flats. We could see the yellow fair-warning and red-danger lights glowing, and we drew to the side, still as a soggy cornshock.

We had a three-lock clinker-built rowboat, light but sound. Pless swung up on the gun'ale with the painter, between lights. Didn't hear a sound. You couldn't see a haunt nights like that! I snuck up, too, and we skirmished around, bare-footed, looking for rope. I don't reckon they's any thicker gloom than a black fog on Old Mississip'!

I snuck down stream; Pless mosied up; the barge was all dark, and on the stern deck there was a coil of rope a good eight feet across, and close to two hundred strands—practically plumb sure a mile long, and half-inch! I scurried back up the running board to the cleat the skiff was moored at. Pless was back. He'd run into three-four tons of four-inch stuff, but nothing we wanted. We dropped the skiff down to the stern and then we edged that coil of half-inch over to the gun'ale, and if anybody thinks handling a mile of line is boy-play, he's got a think coming to him. I was scared to death, but Pless he just took it calm and we eased it down into our skiff—my land!

Working so hard and industrious, or maybe it was the thick fog, we just didn't notice. In the old days, fleet and steamboat watchmen carried lanterns. It had to be sure thick if the light didn't show around ten or twenty yards, anyhow. But these danged modern scoundrels carry light-squirt flashes, and if they ain't smoking, a man hasn't a show in God's world! Moreover, they even wear rubber-soft soles and they might as well be sneaking around bare-footed.

All of a sudden, there was a pipe of light a good thirty-foot long poking through the fog like a pike-pole. Pless said I snorted like a buck deer at a jacklight! As I said, they hire a sure bad-acting class for night watchmen around Government workings. This fellow no sooner heard me than he slashed around and I ducked that pole of blue light like it was a deadfall. And then his gun began to talk. Course, I didn't hang around none. I just jumped! I hit the water head-on, and I bet I dived down twenty feet! Pless takes things calmer. He just slipped the cleat line noose and shoved off the barge side. In fifteen foot he was out of sight, nothing but some bullets splashing around in the confusion.

When I came up, I snorted and Pless got the square stern around so I could climb aboard, and we leaned to on those oars. Course, I was chilly and wet, but when you row a mile of half-inch rope upstream on Old Mississip' you earn it, so much an hour, I'll tell you.

For a while we were anxious. We had to thump and listen for the echo so we could tell where the banks were. Then we got straightened out and across the river, working up the long eddy opposite the Government fleet. Then we bucked the crossing. Then we hit the current and made it into Snaggy Ridge Bend, and if you ever tried angling up the current in a night fog you know how good you got to be to hold the course! But Pless, he could smell which way the fog was running on the current.

Naturally, we felt rambuctious. A mile of Government twist, best quality, half-inch handy-line—why, if we could have spared the breath, we'd sung! Pless and I had had nice rope, now and again. We'd have two hundred feet now and again, but the real mularkey handy line is five hundred feet long, with a spliced loop in each end! That coil was awful heavy, solid! It reached up one side and down

the other over the seats, and we had to get used to rowing, but we managed, pulling and sweating. It was hard work, yes, but worth the trouble.

We heard two or three blockade runners going by, hell-whooping, but all we felt was the wash. If we'd only had a good outboard we'd made good time ourselves, but it just happened we was down low and fine, and lucky we had separate shantyboats and a clinker-built skiff! And only about twenty miles by the channel to go back home. We couldn't waste any time, though the nights were full-length winter. Tired, hungry, but sure feeling good, we made it back just before the fog lifted.

The last two miles we had the reverse-current eddy with us, and just about played out, we kinda floated the last half mile or so. Then the sweat got out our eyes, daylight flared and we climbed aboard my boat stern, hungry and just about all paid down. I was just beginning to relax and feel good when Pless uttered a little yelp, pointing.

Half-inch rope is all alike. Cut into 500-foot handylines, a mile of it makes ten pieces and a short-length for utilities. But our rope was painted every five feet a different color band, white, yellow, blue, red, all those colors. It was plain in a second, what we'd done. We'd taken a Government measuring line, off the survey.

All that sweating and risking for stealing what everybody would know what it was and where it was from! Pless wiped his face in his elbow.

"I'm discouraged!" he said for the first time in his life. And it really takes some doing to get Pless down.

We went into the cabin, too tired to dump the exhibit of criminal activities and hard, mean luck. Sitting there in the kitchen were two fellows, kind of a reception committee. That Government watchman had seen our faces. As I said, those fellows are a mean, forbidding, exasperating class. He'd actually remembered us from back in prohibition times! When he'd got tired of working in Leavenworth, he'd transferred into a Government Fleet—and it'd been our luck to walk right into him!

Pless and me talked it over. From where we sat, it was only too easy to see. We decided it don't do any good trying to get back at the Government! Anyhow, the break didn't come our way.

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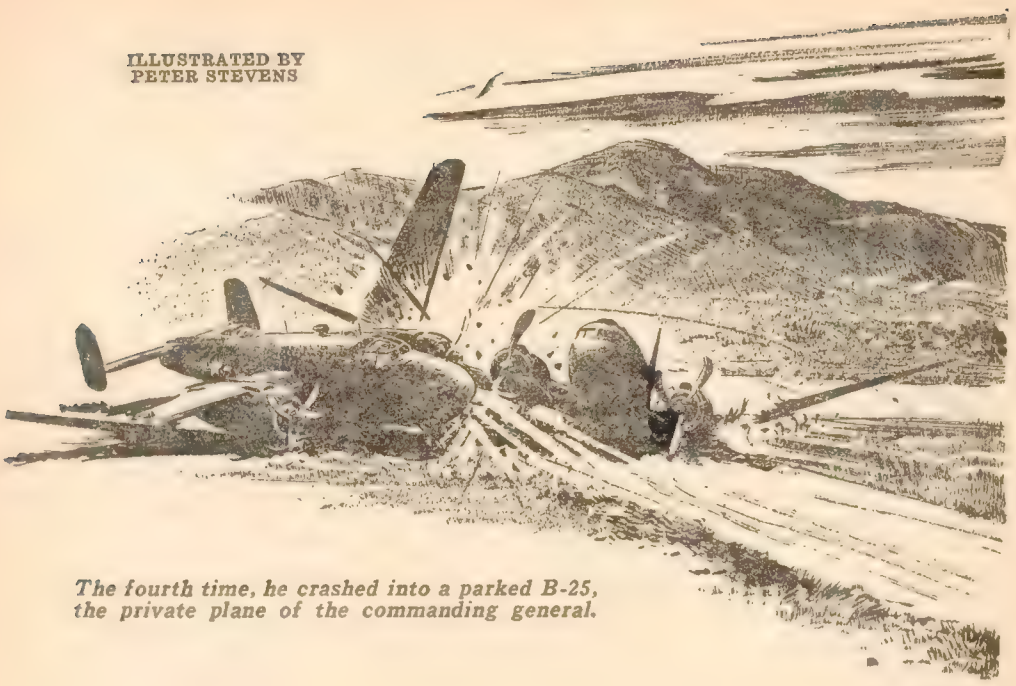
PETER STEVENS



The fourth time, he crashed into a parked B-25, the private plane of the commanding general.

THERE has been a great deal of nonsense—written and spoken—about the famous Hump Route from India to China. Since this flight traverses the difficult Himalaya Mountains, it is an awesome thing to behold, and the cargo taken over it is indeed the Chinese lifeline. A great many scenario writers have been at work on the project, and gradually those who fly it have come to make Superman look like an underpowered victim of pernicious anemia. This obviously cannot be so, since the U. S. Army Air Forces and the China National Airlines are in flight over the mountains day and night, and the total of their routine trips is staggering. Occasionally, however, a pilot on the run becomes outstanding. Jimmy Cluff was one of those. He is the only transport pilot in the world today who has the legitimate rank of "ace."

To be an ace, of course, you have to get five planes. Jimmy finally got his five, and the last one was strange indeed. It is a minor record of American ingenuity. Cluff was late thirtyish, and had been flying so long he had nearly forgotten how. He had the face of an ageing and slightly lecherous faun, and he had flown everything. One night in Calcutta, in one of the big hotels, he put in an hour of stunt flying on an Otis elevator that got six of us jailed, but that is another and lesser story. An ex-army flier, he had been a personal pilot for several of the movie celebrities, and had worked the North Atlantic and South American runs. He had only two speeds, laughing or griping, but his approach to all things had a fundamental simplicity.

The first time I ever saw him, he came into my office and stood looking at the weather board. My job was flight operations for China National Airlines, and I was accustomed to characters. As a matter of fact, I was neck deep in them. When I looked up, he was standing there wearing a dirty baseball cap and a peevish look. The brim of the cap was on the the back of his head, and for a minute I didn't know whether he was coming in or going out.

"I'm Cluff," he said. "Call me Field Marshal."

"If you're a pilot," I answered, "I'll probably call you more than that."

"Don't bother to salute," he said, breathing heavily through his nose. He gave the brim of the baseball cap an angry tug. "When do I leave and which way is it?"

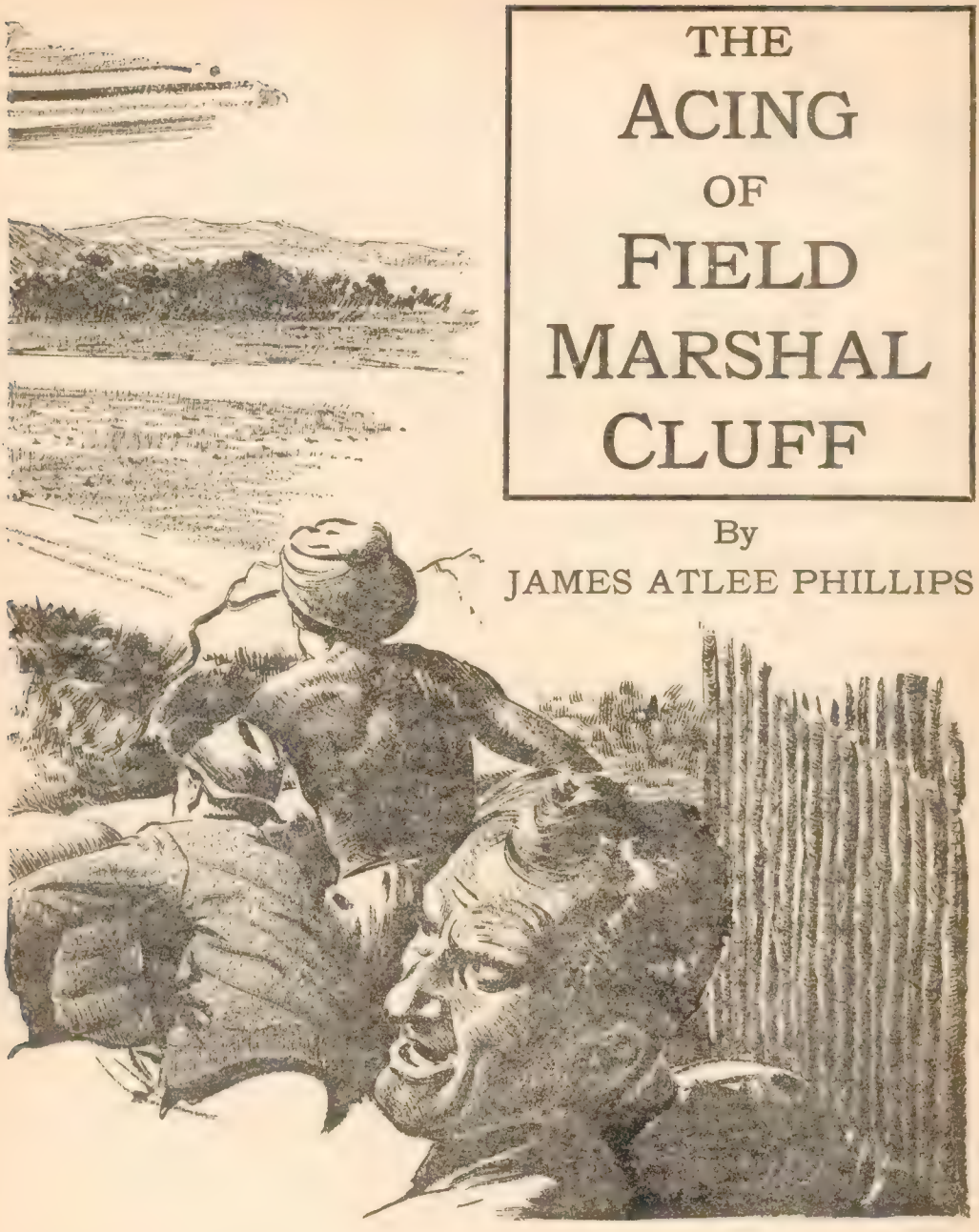
"Which way is what?"

He shook his head impatiently. "Kunming, dunce," he shouted. "That's where we go, ain't it?"

The absolute simplicity of it stunned me. It was his first appearance in Assam, he had no maps, and the briefing information he required

THE ACING OF FIELD MARSHAL CLUFF

By JAMES ATLEE PHILLIPS



was the general direction of China. I lit a cigarette and shook my head slightly, to clear it up. That humming noise seemed to be the wind blowing down the years from Kittyhawk. Then and there I decided that the Field Marshal and I vibrated in the same frequency, and slowly I explained that we certainly did appreciate having him with us, but that a certain knowledge of radio stations, height of mountains, and appreciation of the distance between our fields was considered, by some overcautious executive in the front office, to be necessary to safety. Also, we would like to get him a map.

He took it with bad grace, murmuring something about "paper work and clerks," and after

a certain amount of vitriolic exchange, agreed to ride a few trips as co-pilot. I assigned him to Loane, one of the ex-AVG boys, and they shook hands like two strange dogs. On the side, I gave Loane the office to run him through a few low passes, and Bus nodded, smiling quietly. In eight hours, they were back from a round trip, and Loane was considerably shaken, saying that Cluff had tried to kill him by taxiing on top of mountains he had never seen before. While Bus was talking to me, Cluff came in and announced that our planes were nothing but junk heaps and what was wrong with our maintenance? I said I was sorry and we would try to do better, and then when Loane got ready to leave again, the Field Marshal went swaggering out to the plane behind him like a raffish old pirate.

HE CHECKED out rapidly, and began to fly as captain. I do not exaggerate when I say he began to fly. China National pilots are the highest paid in the world, and they are paid by the hour. On the other hand, they have the privilege of turning down flights whenever they wish. The weather on the hump gets amazingly bad at times, and the flight schedule sometimes resolves itself to a struggle between discretion and greed. Cluff, however, held that the pilots were paid for flying all kinds of weather, and he showed up on the field at all hours. Many days, he would fly a trip and a half, wait until I went home to sleep, and then tell the night operations man that he had just gotten out of bed. Because of this, I would often come to the field before dawn and find him dropping down out of the clouds and chortling with glee at having outwitted my dull staff. The front office in Calcutta sent up several short, terse notes asking if he was an actual blood relation of mine, or was I getting my cut.

He was a great distractor at the pilots' bungalow between flights. Our pilots came from all over the world, and the Field Marshal would sit in session with them and produce what seemed to be the most astounding lies ever conceived by man. They cursed him to his face, and then found out, somehow, that he was usually right. It was disconcerting. He had been married four times. Currently, he said, to one of the most famous female vocalists in the United States. Everybody scoffed at that until a month-old copy of the *Mirror* revealed that Winchell said that the song bird was going to divorce him. Even the diehards had to accept that one, and Cluff chortled with glee.

In his third month as captain, he lost an engine on takeoff. It was at night, and from my office I heard it conk with that diminishing whine that is the most sickening sound in all the world. I pushed back from the desk and sat there through several eternities, listening. It hadn't sounded as though he had gained single engine speed, and sure enough I heard several whacking sounds that meant he was in the tree tops, and then a rending noise like an apartment house falling down. Before that crashing noise ended, I was in the jeep with the first-aid kit and the fire extinguisher, clipping down the taxi strip. The tires squawled like a soul in purgatory as I skidded onto the asphalt runway. I was looking up ahead into the darkness beyond the red lights at the end of the runway, hoping that no flames would billow up. The darkness was unbroken, and I turned off onto the tea garden road. Behind me, I heard the siren of the field ambulance start whining.

The progress of the Field Marshal was not hard to follow. He had cut a nice wide swathe, and when I came bursting through the tea bushes, he shouted at me.

"Where the hell you been?" he asked angrily. I said I was sorry about being late, and looked at the plane. One wing was torn off, the stabilizers were sheared, and the prop blades were folded back nicely to the cowling. The radio operator had a lump on the back of his head, but other than that nobody was hurt. Cluff went around picking up his headset and baggage, and we all walked back through the waist-high tea to the jeep.

Just as we started to turn around, the ambulance came roaring up and nearly ran over us. This enraged the Field Marshal. He got out and asked the sergeant who was driving if he was trying to kill somebody. The sergeant said no, he had just come after the crew of the crashed plane. Then Cluff said the crew didn't need any ambulance—if they had, they would have sent for one, and for the sergeant to quit trying to tear up government equipment, bought with taxpayers' money. As I swung the jeep back on the road, my headlights swept across the mute sergeant's face. He was staring at the tree tops, at the wide opening Cluff's plane had made in the branches. He looked outraged, and a great deal like a man who wished he was back in Great Falls, Montana.

That was the first one. Two weeks later, the Field Marshal piled one up in the Mishmi Hills, crashlanded it at night in a little stream about fifty feet wide. We flew over the wreckage, and after three days even those who had cursed Cluff most fervently began to think up some nice things to say about him. On the fourth day, however, a dun-colored RAF truck pulled up in front of the office, and the Field Marshal climbed out of it. He stood there, unshaven and angry in the noon sunlight, telling the driver that if he didn't get some new springs for the truck he, Cluff, was going to call a Yellow Cab next time. The driver, a turbaned Punjabi, was grinning hugely and folding up a sheaf of rupees. Cluff came into the

office, glared at me from under that greasy baseball cap, and said that he resigned. I accepted. However, after getting five hours' sleep, he was flying back to China in another plane.

THE third one was uneventful, his landing gear collapsed on Kunming Field, and the Douglas was strewn out for three hundred yards or so. It got so the mechanics and the off-duty pilots would ask what time he was due, and then be there waiting in clusters, as at a circus or a matinee.

Nearly a month went by between the third and fourth, but when it did come it was spectacular, and those who had waited so patiently in the cheap seats felt fully rewarded. Major General Younger, commanding all the troop carrier squadrons in the C.B.I. theatre, was visiting our field. His private plane, a silver, heavily-armored B-25 medium bomber, was parked just east of the intersection of the runways. Late in the afternoon, Cluff came hurtling over the Patkai Range, let down into the valley, and landed. His right brake locked on the runway, the Douglas groundlooped viciously, and swung into the parked B-25.

The crash was heard for some miles. Everybody on the field started scurrying like mad, and the impetus was increased when machine guns started chattering. We could not be blamed for supposing the Nips were overhead, because we had been raided the day before. It was some time before I raised up from my slit trench and found that Cluff's plane, crashing into the B-25, had tripped the guns in the bomber. While we were running and diving with great abandon, he had been sitting there facing eight exploding fifty-caliber guns. When I drove up, he was crouched under a wing, looking at the bullet holes. His left arm was bleeding.

"Got me!" he shouted irascibly, still squatting under the wing and pointing with his right hand at the bloody sleeve. "Purple Heart," he shouted. He came out and stood by my jeep.

"When the general sees his chariot," I answered wryly, "you may be purple all over."

He removed the baseball cap and regarded the locked planes. "Reckon he'll be sore?"

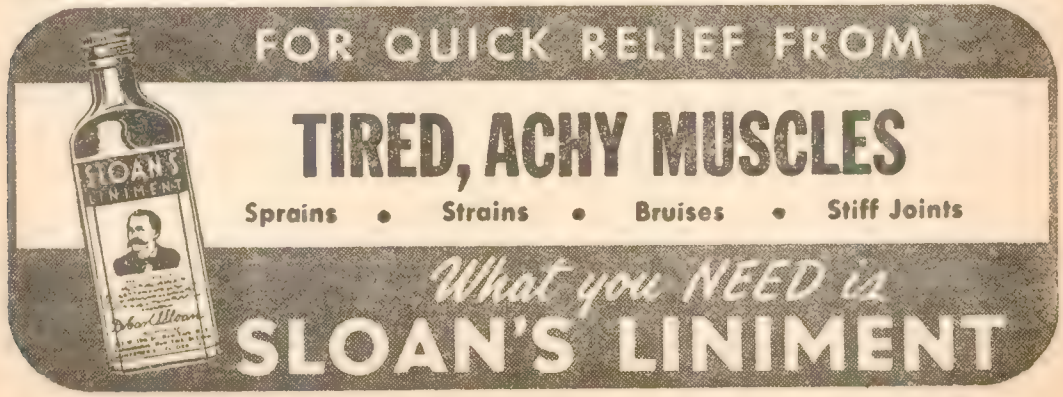
"Why?" I asked. "He probably wanted to trade it in on a B-29 anyway. Probably thank you."

The Field Marshal put the cap back on and began to tell how the brake locked on him. I nodded, and while we were sitting there a major came over and said the general would like to talk to me, at headquarters. I suspected that the general would do most of the talking, but I went over anyway. My suspicion was correct.

They fired the Field Marshal for that. We had the maintenance department examine the brake drum on the right wheel, and, sure enough, it was locked tight. I submitted the report to Calcutta, and they sent back a notice saying that Cluff, in six months, had cost the airline nearly $400,000, and that if he favored us with his services much longer, our part of the China War would be over, because we would be out of airplanes. Cluff went down to Calcutta, and I didn't hear from him for two weeks. Then I got a radio message which said to telephone him at a certain number at a certain time that night. Since our part of the upper Assam valley is not, and never has been connected to lower India by telephone, I was forced to disregard the request. It was a heartening thing, however, in that it showed the Field Marshal was still using the direct approach. It was not his fault that India was so backward.

A month later, he got off the Calcutta plane. He was carrying all his flight gear. We never knew, and haven't found out yet, how he got reinstated, but there he was. Indicative of the turned-leaf tendency was the fact that he had gotten the baseball cap cleaned—but other than that, he was unchanged. Forrester, the maintenance chief, took one look at him, groaned like a man stabbed through the heart, and began slapping himself on the forehead with both hands. He was still giving out a low ululation

(Continued on page 145)



By NARD JONES

ILLUSTRATED BY RAY BETHERS

ZEB PARTRIDGE, accompanied by a pair of squaws, stood on the wharf landing that jutted out into the Columbia halfway between the Four O'Clock Rapids and Wallula. The *Dannie Loop*, Captain Caleb Davis at the wheel, was coming upstream, but the tall man on the wharf landing gave no more notice to it than did his brown female companions.

The trio seemed to consider their presence on the wharf landing as evidence enough that they were waiting to be picked up, seemed to take it for granted that they would be. And they were right, for the *Dannie Loop* gave a blast from her whistle and began easing toward the right bank.

Zeb Partridge was a sight, as he always was after he had been back in the hills for a time—after he had "gone Injun" as they said along the river. His trousers were tattered and streaked with alkali dust and he wore moccasins that were laid open like salmon for the frying pan. His boat cap was not in evidence; it was hidden beneath the short Indian blanket

The Loop *was open end to end now, and a good part of the river was whirling through her. All around were the pitiful dark forms of steers struggling in the current.*

that shielded his big shoulders from the wind whipping downriver through Hellgate and past the twin rock spires the pilots knew as "The Sisters."

At the sound of the whistle, Partridge's face grew darker and he looked at the two squaws from beneath his heavy lids. Davis had not needed to blow that signal for the landing. Now there would be a lot of curious passengers coming out of the cabins to stand at the rail to see the man and the Indian women come on board.

That was like Davis, damn him, Partridge told himself. None of the other captains would have blown the whistle. The wind was cold on deck, and without that blast from the whistle the three could have slipped on board and disappeared into the freight room. But already, now, men and women had come to the rail and were looking out toward the strange trio. Partridge's gaunt face tightened and he straightened his shoulders defiantly under the robe.

Davis held the big packet nicely alongside,

just for an instant, and Zeb and the two squaws —one young and not bad-looking, the other quite old—stepped onto the deck. At once the *Dannie Loop* took full ahead again and began moving out toward the center of the giant stream that had come down from the Canadian Rockies to empty into the Pacific.

Before Partridge and the women could get off the foredeck and out of sight, Captain Davis pulled down a glass in the pilot house and yelled out, "Hallo there, Zeb! Been gone quite a spell, ain't you?"

The hard chin, much in need of a shave, tilted upward. The eyes glittered under tangled red hair that was oddly out of place above the dark face. He did not answer and Davis went on, "I won twenty dollars from Eph Baughman and Tom Stump, Zeb. We each put up a ten and the captain that picked you up this time gets the pot—and that's me!"

Still without answer, Partridge walked off the foredeck and into the freight room. The two women were already squatted on the floor. He perched his long frame on a packing case and stared at the after bulkhead. The *Loop's* mate passed through, and he looked square at Partridge—but he did not give any sign of recognition, nor did Zeb. The mate did not even notice the two women sitting on the floor.

The mate knew Zeb and he knew that Partridge did not like to be recognized when he had gone Injun. Everybody who worked for the line understood that. Captain Davis understood it, too, but he was the only one who rubbed it into Zeb—like blowing that landing whistle and bringing everybody out to look, and yelling down from the wheel house that way.

The mate thought he knew why Captain Davis liked to rub it in. Partridge had once tried to marry the girl who was Mrs. Davis now, but her old man wouldn't have it because Zeb Partridge was a half-breed. The mate thought to himself that she had got a full-blooded white man for a husband, but she hadn't got a better river man. There just wasn't any better than Zeb Partridge, lower, middle, or upper Columbia. But the men who ran the Oregon Navigation Company wouldn't depend on him to keep a boat like the *Dannie Loop,* or the *Daisy Ainsworth,* or the *Harvest Queen,* on schedule day in and day out. So he remained a relief pilot, or taught young fellows who were learning the river.

Zeb himself had learned the river from his father, a great roaring bear of a man who ran a wood barge for the steamboats. His mother was a Yakima—and they said that was why Zeb would go Injun—disappear into the hills with a jug of whiskey and a nasty temper to live with the Yakimas or the Klickitats or a band of Nez Percés from the valley up north. Others said that his old man had taught him to dislike white men and that periodically this teaching must boil out in him. That could be true, for the old man asked just before he died, to be buried on Memaloose Island, in the middle of the river, with the scattered bones of the Klickitats. "With," as the old man said, "honest men and women."

When he wasn't going Injun, Partridge was alert and handsome, and his boat cap would be sitting clean and foursquare on his red head. Then, after four or five months, a kind of wild look would get into his eyes and the men on the boats knew what was coming. Zeb would disappear, and a week or two later he would show up as he had today on the *Loop.*

There was always something that got you, about the way Zeb would return from the hills. He wouldn't wear the boat cap, but he'd have it somewhere on him, clean and taken care of. He wouldn't put it on, though, until he himself was as clean and smart looking. It was as if he wasn't Zeb Partridge at all until he shaved and had new clothes and his cap on.

He'd go through the ending always the same way, as if he felt he had to take it, had to punish himself. The mate knew where he was taking the young squaw and her mother. He was taking them to Walla Walla in broad daylight to buy them presents. He'd do it in the sight of those who knew him. He'd ride with the Indian women on the narrow-gauge from the Wallula landing to the town of Walla Walla; he'd take them to a store and buy them calico and a looking-glass and maybe a smooth-bore for the old man back in the hills. Only then would he leave them and walk into the barber shop at the Stine House. When he came out, shaved, with his boat cap on his head, he'd be Zeb Partridge, relief pilot for the O. S. N. Company.

ZEB kept on his boat cap until late fall and he did not encounter Davis again until after that expedition, in the dusk of an October evening. Partridge had just come back from the Wasco hills, and he had lost his coat and was shivering bitterly on the wharf at Dalles City when he saw Captain Davis.

The *Dannie Loop* was along side and Partridge had been watching workmen fixing wooden bulkheads around the engine. There were two hundred cattle for shipment down to Portland, Zeb learned, and the *Loop* was going to have to take them down as far as the Cascades portage. The *Idaho,* the reserve boat, was too small to handle the live beef, so Davis was ordered to make a night trip of it on the *Dannie Loop.*

The snow had been sifting down all afternoon, until now the street leading to the wharf was striped with the dirty brown ribbons left by the wagon wheels. The big river was

swallowing up the white flakes endlessly as Partridge stood watching the cattle load. Suddenly Davis walked under the wharf light and, although he saw Partridge, he said nothing.

Surprised, Zeb watched him. The captain paced the length of the vessel nervously, then returned to watch the cattle. Partridge walked nearer to him, to make sure that Davis could see that he had no boat cap and needed a shave badly. And still the captain did not have anything to say. Suddenly it came to Zeb. Davis had never made a night run in bad weather and he did not like the idea.

Partridge faced him. "Something troubling you, Cap'n?" he asked.

Davis started. Then he said, "I have to take these damned cattle down to the Cascades. I just don't like the idea of making a cattle boat out of the *Dannie Loop*, that's all."

"Oh," said Partridge, and added, "I'd like to ride down to the portage, if you don't mind."

It was only then that Davis remembered himself. "What are you asking for? Don't we always take you where you want to go free for nothing after you've been Injun? Where's the squaw?" Davis pretended to peer into the growing darkness, looking for her. "I'm already taking down two hundred head of cattle—one more cow won't matter."

He laughed then, but he would not have laughed if he could have seen clearly the steely look in Zeb Partridge's eyes. "I find nothing to sneer at in Indian women," Zeb said slowly.

"I guess they're all right," Davis said, "if a man can't get a white woman." Then, very quickly, he stepped onto the deck of the *Dannie Loop*. Partridge stood there quietly, the snow flicking against his hot face. He heard the wind rising against his ears, and he watched the flakes whip upriver from the west, not falling onto the wharf, but sweeping on into the vast blackness astern of the *Dannie Loop*.

He stepped on board.

The loading of the cattle was pandemonium, but quickly done. At the signal, Davis slid the packet into the current. Soon he had passed Crates Point and was taking the long crossing to avoid the sand bar that reached like a finger out from Cayuse Rock. When he got into the channel current, he knew that he had a job on his hands. The wind was still rising, and the snow was not good, not good at all. He felt and strained against the darkness, getting dizzy with the white flakes streaking at the wheel house over the feeble lamps on the foredeck. Carefully, he felt for the channel along the Washington shore and tried to see the rocky headland that would mark for him the mouth of the Klickitat.

The mate came into the wheelhouse on a swirl of snow. He was both mate and deck hand tonight. Beside the captain, the only others on board for the cattle run were the engineer and the fireman—and Zeb Partridge, the free passenger.

"You'd swear that snow was black!" said the mate, and swore it.

That made Devis feel no better. He let her go with the current, slipping back to midstream, back alongside Memaloose Island, where the Indians buried their dead, and then Memaloose slipped by like a wraith itself. Mosier Rocks, that frothed the Columbia's dark surface went past, and that made Davis feel some better.

The mate's pipe smelled cold and strong in the darkness. "This is sure a night to make rudder trails in the cow pastures!" he said.

Davis whirled on him, then was glad that the darkness veiled his startled annoyance. "Partridge is on board tonight," he said to the mate. "I could use him."

"He ain't got his cap. He's still Injun. Maybe he won't come."

"Damn his eyes, he works for the O. S. N. and he's on board tonight and I'm the master of this vessel! Tell him I want him up here!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" The mate never said that on the Columbia unless the old man was sore or upset, and he figured Davis was both. He found Partridge half asleep in the big saloon, empty now of passengers, and convinced him that he was wanted in the pilot house.

Partridge smiled slowly at the mate, then un-

folded his long frame. Without hurry he went out on deck and found his way to the ladder leading to the pilot house. "You wanted me?" he asked when he had closed the door against the wind.

"Yes," said Davis shortly. "You might stand by. It's a hell of a night."

Partridge leaned against the bulkhead that separated the wheelhouse from the Texas. "I guess it is if you haven't done a night run this time of year." Without turning his head he said, "The gorge gets narrower here."

Davis said nothing. He began to use the whistle, listening for the echo, calculating the distance and knowing that Partridge, somewhere behind him, was calculating it too. At every blast of the whistle the cattle grew more disturbed, and Davis could hear their lowing and jostling. The noises plucked at his already jangled nerves.

"You can't see it," Partridge said, "but we're just about to come abeam of Wind Mountain."

Davis could not see the great crumbling sentinel, but he knew that Partridge must be right. Suddenly he said, "Zeb, why don't you take over?" and then he wished that he hadn't said it for he realized that the mate had opened the door and was standing there. "What are you doing up here?" he yelled. "Get up in the peak with a lantern and signal me if I'm off course!"

When the mate had gone, Davis said again, "You really ought to take the wheel, Zeb."

"Oh, no," said Partridge quietly. "This is your run, Cap'n. And I'm still Injun."

Zeb's smile was frozen and cruel in the darkness. He could literally savor Davis' growing panic. It transmitted itself to him; it was growing there in the wheelhouse.

HE could feel the chop growing higher, and he heard Davis call into the tube for more steam, his voice strained. Gradually the *Dannie Loop* began to go harder ahead and her blunt nose pounded so that she shook from keel to stacks. Davis was using the whistle continuously now, trying to check his position in the channel, marking the quality of the echo, attempting to tell whether it sprang back from basalt or the soft cushion of the thick pines.

Partridge knew that that the captain was working into a bad spot. Thus far, Davis only felt it; but there would come that paralyzing instant when he would know it for sure. All his life, Davis had been seeing the power of the Columbia. Always there had been that consciousness that disaster could lie in the next white rapids, or strike from the shifting base of the next basalt slide—current faster than calculated, a sudden gust of wind down a hillside, a trick from the rudder.

Davis knew these things and they were in his mind now, Partridge told himself. Davis would be seeing the *Dannie Loop* proud and whole upon the river, her black plumes trailing back, her paddles walking majestically. He would be seeing her glittering chandeliers, and the green pattern of her Brussels carpet, and the gleaming silver in the dining saloon.

Partridge knew what Davis was thinking, but he had thoughts of his own, too. He was remembering Davis sneering when he saw Zeb returning from an Injun holiday. He was recalling what Davis had said about Indian women, and he remembered what Davis' father-in-law had said when Zeb had wanted to marry the girl Davis had finally married.

Then, in the darkness, he heard the wheel ropes straining as Davis spun the big wheel in a frenzy. It was too late, and Zeb knew it instantly. The *Dannie Loop* struck so hard that Zeb was thrown from the bulkhead to the windows, and he saw a cloud of white lift over the bow, taking the lamp as it came, and taking the mate and his lantern. The floor of the pilot house tilted crazily and a hundred sounds split open the night. The ripping of the forward planking, the grinding of twisting beams and frames, and then the splintering of the paddle buckets out astern.

Davis cursed without meaning, and tore open the wheelhouse door. Partridge followed him, and as he reached the deck, one of the stacks crashed overside, ripping like cloth at the rivets. The broad base, torn from the metal column, rolled toward Davis, exuding a warm woodbreath. Davis threw out his arms and yelled at it, then the sound stopped in the captain's throat as it took him over the side.

It had happened too quickly for Partridge to do anything, and he stood there an instant wondering crazily if he would have done anything if it had been possible. Behind him the door of the texas swung open with a shriek and Partridge turned to see the inside of Davis' cabin. The gimbal-mounted lamp was smoking the leaning wall, and in the light of its flickering rays Partridge saw the photograph tacked above the neat bunk.

It was a picture taken by some itinerant photographer and it showed a blond young woman standing on the porch of a small white house. On each side of her, half buried in her billowing skirts, was a small child as blond as she. Like a man in a dream, Partridge pulled the photograph from the wall and slipped it into the pocket of his shirt.

He was still standing there uncertainly when the *Loop* swung around, warning him. He stumbled down the companionway and on the lower deck he saw the mate—whom he had not expected to see—and the engineer and fireman. They were struggling to get a boat down from the twisted davits. "Where's the cap'n?"

the mate yelled, and Partridge, saving his breath against the wind, made only a meaningful gesture with his arm.

They understood him but made no comment. They had no time for talk just then.

As they got the boat away, they heard the hissing of ashes floating out of the boiler. The hot smell of them whirled on the flakes of snow. The paddle wheels of the *Loop* were a mass of twisted steel and wood. She was open end to end now, and a good part of the big river was whirling clean through her. All around them were the pitiful dark forms of steers struggling in the current. Suddenly Partridge saw something whirling alongside the boat and he reached out and grabbed it. The other men, hard at the oars, did not see him ring it out in his big fists and then shape it over his tangled red hair.

It took only a minute, and then he was sitting as before, watching for the dark shore line.

They did not try to talk until they had got the boat ashore. They tumbled out, ignoring it as soon as their feet touched land. Without trying to save it, they crept up the shale rock to a spot where the big pines offered some shelter from the wind. There they sank down shivering.

The whistle of the *Dannie Loop* and the bellowing of the cattle had been heard at the Cascades landing. It was not long until the shivering men saw coming up to them the torches of an excited search party. Striding in the lead was the big Cascades agent for the O. S. N.

"Where's Cap'n Davis?"

The mate and the engineer and the fireman looked at Partridge. "The stack tore off and took him with it," Partridge said. "Swept him right over the side. I was at the wheel when it happened. It was awful quick, but it seems like we must have struck—"

"But Davis was the master," the agent said. "The company has got to have all the details of the accident."

Partridge nodded, and for the first time the mate noticed the cap, soggy and shapeless. "I can tell you about it," Partridge said. "Cap'n Davis was seized with cramps and he handed me his cap and told me I had to take over. The mate here knows I was ordered up topsides and later he heard Davis tell me to take the wheel. He seemed to be feeling pretty bad, so I took over for him."

A great heave of air came out of his lungs and they could not tell whether he sighed or shook with cold. "Davis gave me the course, and I—I didn't follow it. What happened ain't no reflection on him or the company. And I can swear his record makes his widow and kids eligible to pension for life. He was absolutely in the clear."

The agent grunted. "Let's get back to the landing and put some hot coffee into these men." He turned to Zeb Partridge solicitously. "Sorta looks to me like you've done it for good now, Zeb."

"Well," Zeb Partridge said, pulling off the shapeless cap and handing it to the agent, "it had to come some time, sooner or later. I guess nobody's gonna be too surprised. Maybe his kids would like to keep that cap."

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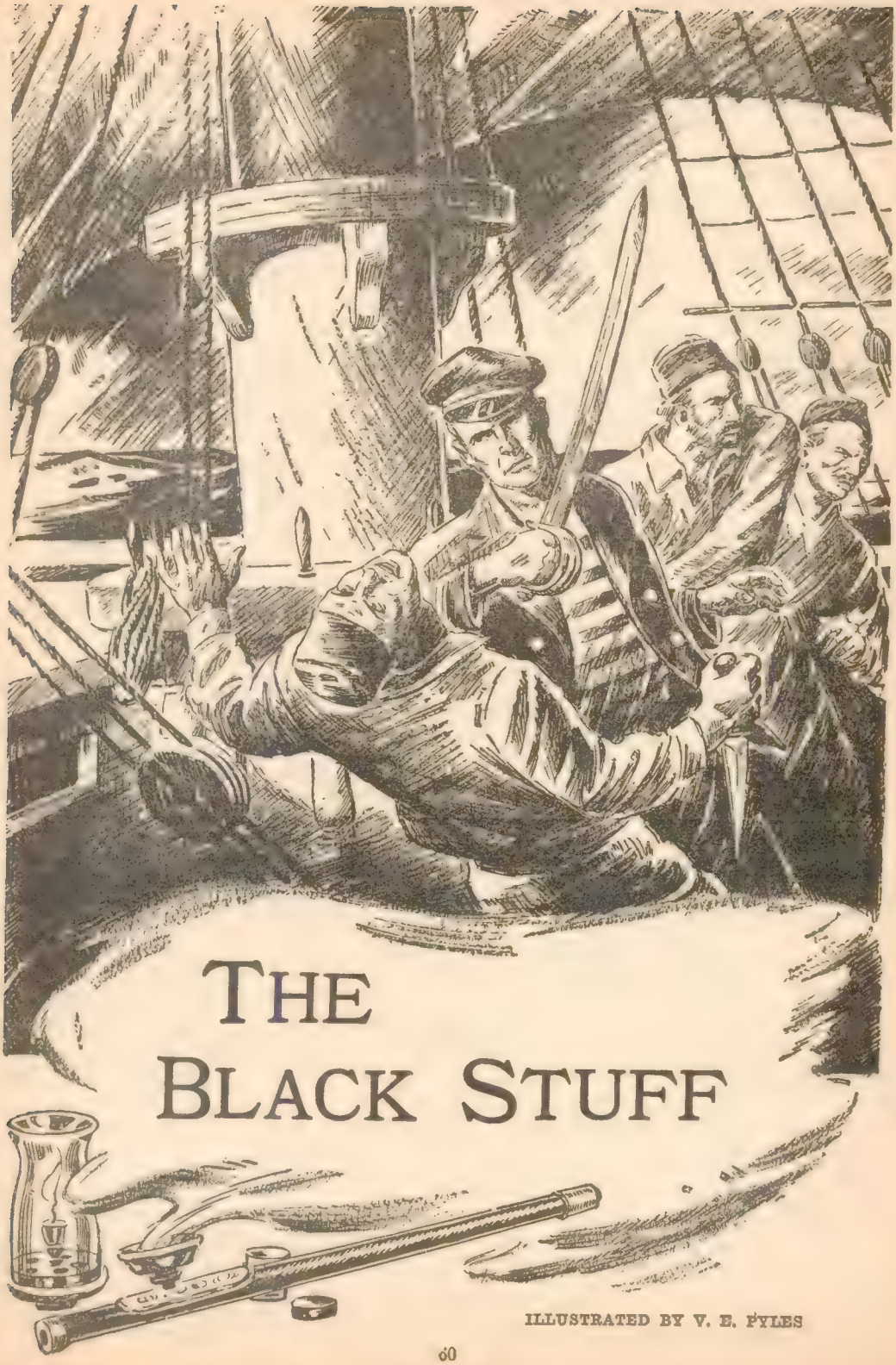

THE BLACK STUFF

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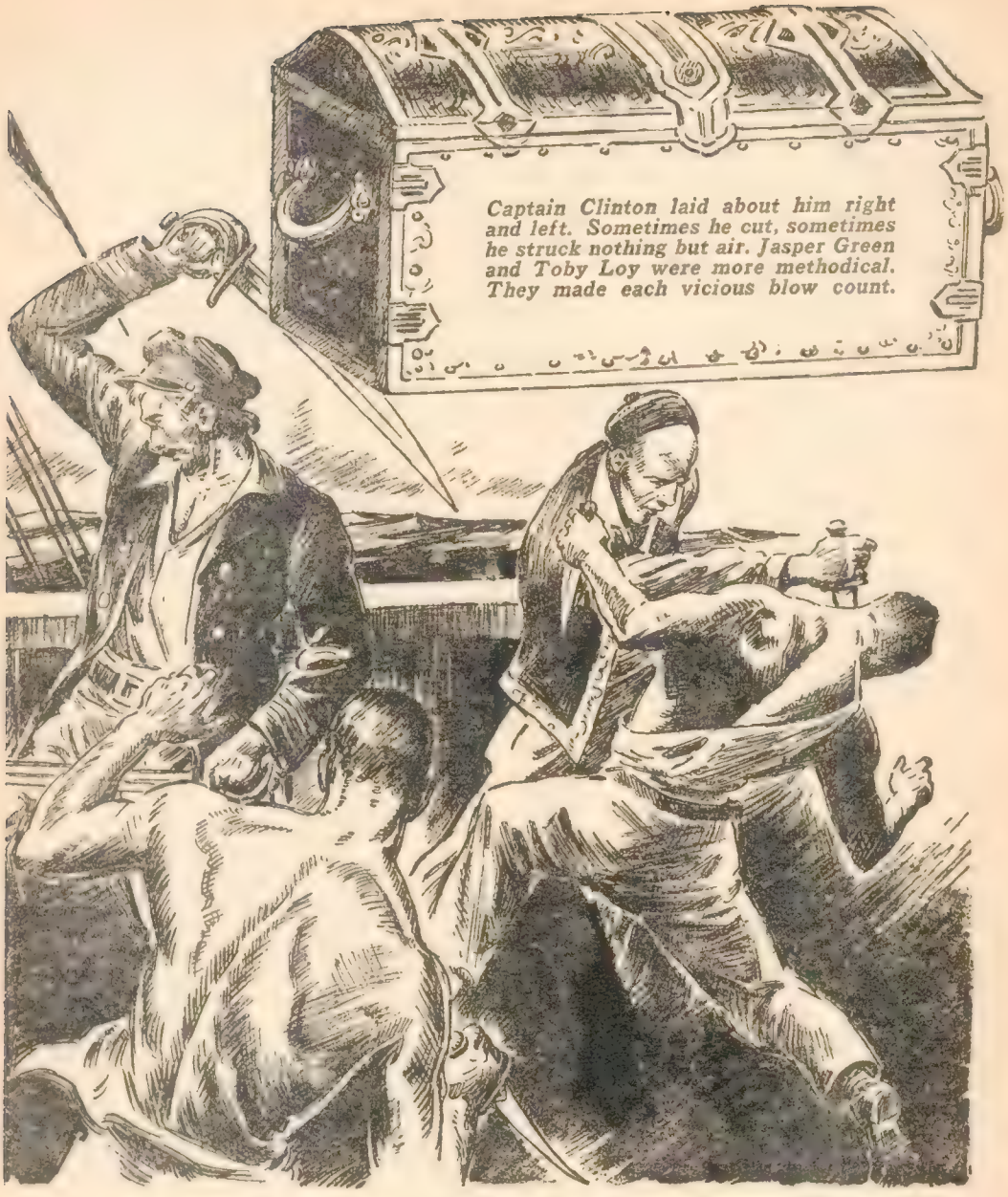

Captain Clinton laid about him right and left. Sometimes he cut, sometimes he struck nothing but air. Jasper Green and Toby Loy were more methodical. They made each vicious blow count.

By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

JASPER GREEN scanned the canvas and shook his head. They had everything on, they were fairly flying, but it was the crew he was worried about, not the *Hannah* herself. It would be hard enough getting ahead of the *Fairy*, all the while beating up against the northwest monsoon in the year's worst season—it would be hard enough with proper sailor men. With these Lascars—slum sweepings and scourings, landsmen who owed money to the crimps or had been shanghaied—and with the second left in a Singapore jail after a stabbing match, the first laid up with sickness Jasper hated even to think about, and the skipper downright drunk, well . . . The Lascars would work all right; they were willing, and

fairly strong. But would they be of any use in a blow? Jasper doubted it, and he worried. He came from a worrying family—and he was only twenty-one.

Granted the bosun, the serang as they called him, and his two tindals were real finds. They were Chinese, husky, wise, silent men who understood canvas and who spoke every known language and dialect. It was through them that Jasper Green addressed the crew. These three were good, yes. They were almost too good, almost suspiciously good, considering the wages.

"Oh, Mr. Green, just a moment, if you please."

He stopped, touching his cap. He didn't frown, but he didn't smile either. He seldom did smile.

"I hear that the first officer is ill?"

"Yes, ma'am. I'm on my way to see him now."

"I wonder if we might go with you, my brother and myself? My brother might be able to give him some spiritual consolation."

"I think what he wants, really, is quinine."

"But it certainly wouldn't do any *harm* if we visited him."

Uneasy, Jasper Green looked out to sea.

"He—he's pretty sick, ma'am. And feverish. Maybe I'd better visit him first and see if he feels sociable?"

He did not tell her that he was nervous about going to the first's cabin himself, that if the first had what he himself and Jasper feared—well, this sister of a missionary would run screaming away. Or would she? At that, she didn't look a coward. She was English or Scottish, he wasn't sure which, and she had reddish-brown hair, reddish-brown eyes, a friendly pert nose and freckles. She was a pretty woman, and her eyes were frank and her voice was low; but though he'd scarcely found a chance to get acquainted, Jasper had a hunch that she could be firm enough if she felt like it.

"Well, perhaps that would be best," she admitted tactfully. "But you will let us know if we can do anything?"

"Yes, ma'am."

He would have gone on, but she touched his arm.

"Perhaps," she said, and her eyes flashed, "perhaps the first officer was made ill by the fumes from that horrible cargo?"

Jasper opened his eyes very wide.

"Oh, no. Opium doesn't stink. Except when somebody smokes it. The smoke is black."

"If you ask me, so are the souls of the men who traffic in it."

"Eh?"

"Black, I mean."

"Oh."

He understood her perfectly—he was only feigning stupidity. He was anxious to avert a sermon, for this girl, in other matters good-natured enough, was a crank on the subject of opium. No doubt this was because of her brother, the preacher, whom she clearly adored. Jasper had little enough use for him, a spindly, unctuous, nutmeg-voiced meddler. Dr. Wallace had raised a terrible screech when, a few hours out of port, he had learned the nature of the cargo. He had demanded to be put back at once, but the Old Man, drunk even then, had only laughed.

"It's astounding," Miss Wallace said now, "that we were not told in advance that this was . . . well, *that* kind of boat."

"This vessel is a clipper bark, ma'am, not a boat." He cast his glance along the deck, all teak. "They wouldn't put lines like this on any craft so's it could haul cotton, say."

"We should certainly have been returned to port!"

"Not with the *Fairy* getting under way two hours before we could. We'd neck-and-necked it all the way from Calcutta, and we've all got our shirts on the *Hannah*, here, to reach Canton first. I've even bet my shares in her."

"Oh, you're a part-owner? I should think then that you'd have something to say about the nature of the cargo?"

"Ma'am, I own two shares. That's two sixty-fourths of the vessel. That wouldn't give me the right to dictate what cargo she'll carry, even if I was the skipper, which I ain't."

She changed her tone, smiled.

"Well, are we going to win?"

He came from Connecticut.

"I guess we might," he answered.

She leaned close, her hand still on his arm, her eyes searching his face. She liked and trusted this sober young man, the only decent, clean responsible person in the crew, she thought.

"But, getting back to the cargo, Mr. Green, it's against the law to take it into China, isn't it?"

"Yes, ma'am. But we don't take it in. We transfer it to a floating godown at the anchorage, which is international waters. What they do with it after that's their own business."

"You're prevaricating, Mr. Green!"

"I'm doing my job, ma'am. I'm a sailor."

He touched his cap again, and went to the first mate's cabin.

IN FACT, though he would not admit it to the Wallace girl, Jasper was uneasy about being on an opium clipper. He'd rather be in an office, where he could make real money and where he'd be safe. Sailoring was a fool's job, one to which he had no intention of clinging after he'd made himself a small stake and could set up a decent establishment on land. There was money to be made at Can-

ton, and Jasper intended to make it. When he had made enough, he would go back to Connecticut, buy himself a house and maybe look around for a wife. *When* he had made enough. Well, this voyage itself, if they beat the *Fairy*, would give him his start.

Meanwhile he was running opium, a lucrative but notoriously dangerous job. Jasper Green liked this clipper, the *Hannah*, as any man would—he had sailed on her clear around the Horn, he'd been on her almost three years now—but he had no use for the owners or for the skipper, a souse, and a disagreeable one to boot. The skipper's reputation was such that it was difficult to raise a crew for the *Hannah*. Despite the wages, it was always difficult to crew up an opiumer, anyway. Accustomed to the beamy forecastles of wallahs, the hands along the Hooghly had no use for the quarters a clipper's lean pinched lines made imperative. Three runs a year meant bucking both monsoons, with rainy weather, when sleeping on deck would be impossible and scud and spray flew without pause. Those were typhoon seas, too, and though the clippers were fast, they were breathlessly frail and most of them were overmasted and overrigged. Another thing, those waters swarmed with pirates, and everybody knew that pirates particularly loved opium clippers with their rich appointments, their rich cargoes, the treasures in Sycee silver they brought back.

On top of that, there was the superstition. Anywhere in the Far East they would tell you that nobody ever profited, in the long run, by dealing in opium. There's a curse on the stuff, they'd say. Man after man who had made a fortune out of the "black mud" never lived to enjoy it. That's what they said, anyway. Not that Jasper Green was superstitious but when you added to it the dangers everybody could see, it made you uncomfortable to remember that kind of talk.

"You get the hell out of here," yelled the first mate. "I'm as good as dead already, and beginning to rot. Go on!"

His name was Abner Lessing, and he had lived near Jasper in New London, had been a friend of Jasper's uncle, and indeed had got Jasper the third mate's berth. He was a very profane man and violent in his manner, but in fact steady and dependable.

Jasper put down the cup of tea he'd been carrying. He started to arrange the bedclothes. He didn't like the smell of the place.

"Throw that swill out! I can't keep anything on my stomach, anyway!"

"I brought you some quinine, too."

"I don't want it. I tell you there's no saving me, and if you've got any sense you'll clear out before you catch it yourself."

"How do you feel?"

"Terrible. Matter of fact, the only thing that'll keep me from dying of it will be that cabin boy killing me first. I'll bet the bastard's thinking of it. I can see it in his eyes. Hand me down that horse pistol, Jasper, and then you get out. I'm not going to give that Chink the satisfaction of polishing me off before my time. Or maybe some of those Lascars. He's probably told them, and they're panicky. Some of them were twittering around outside the door there a little while ago."

"You're feverish," said Jasper.

"I'll bet I am! I'll bet I've got a hundred and six! All the same, I heard those cutthroats. I wouldn't be surprised if they rushed me. That's why I want that pistol. . . Thanks."

"You'll be all right. I spoke to the Old Man, but—"

"Still ossified, eh? Well, he'd better straighten up if that pack of murderers we hired chuck me over the rail and then go on a spree. I don't like that bunch, Jasper. Didn't like 'em when we signed 'em on, but the Old Man wouldn't hear of any further delay. I'm leaving you my four shares in the ship, incidentally. My will's in my chest."

"Stop all this talk about dying!"

"Why? You can get the hell out of here, if you don't like it. Only thing, I wouldn't mention to anybody else what I've got."

"Well, the Old Man knows."

"Oh, sure. If he had any sense he'd put a bullet into me, himself," Lessing muttered. "Right thing to do. 'S duty. Good skipper'd do that. Do it myself, I think, if I was skipper and you had bubonic plague. I *think*. Won't say I would but I won't say I wouldn't, either."

The rest was gibberish, and Mr. Lessing's eyes were closed. Though Jasper stayed for more than two hours, when he should have been sleeping after standing two watches on end, Lessing said nothing further that made sense. Once he vomited a little. He did not turn his head when he did this, and didn't seem aware of it. Jasper wiped the vomit off with a handkerchief he later threw away. It had been a good handkerchief, too—it had cost him ten annas in Calcutta. The vomit was black.

EZRA JOHN CLINTON was a first-rate skipper at sea, a first-rate businessman ashore. He was a person of substance, owning twelve shares of the *Hannah*, besides bits of other vessels and a quarter-share of a Macao warehouse. On the long trip out from Connecticut, Jasper Green had been in considerable awe of him, for the captain then was a sober, taciturn man who seldom raised his voice, but who missed little. The change had come after they had reached the East. It was not Captain Clinton's first visit. He took to his bottle like a man who takes up an old

The Reverend Dr. Wallace was coming again to protest about the cargo.

and long-missed mistress. He no longer read the Bible. He still kept his thoughts to himself, but he was harsh and over-exacting in some matters, too careless in others. He seldom had a good word for anybody. With innate canniness, and despite his excesses, he continued to drive hard bargains ashore, making a lot of money for the owners, and, of course, for himself. But at sea, at least for the first three or four days out of a given port, his manners, his skill and indeed even his great courage seemed gone. He acted a frightened man then, shifty, unsure of himself.

Now the captain's eyes, bloodshot and suspicious, raked his third mate's face.

"Do *you* think he's got it?"

"Well, I'm no doctor. . . But I do think so."

"He'd know himself. He's had some experience with it."

"Well, he's sure he's got it, himself. Says he'll be dead before tomorrow morning."

"We may all be dead by that time," muttered Ezra John Clinton. He hiccupped. "Or wishing we were," he added. "Better not go there any more."

"But somebody's got to tend him, sir! He says the cabin boy wants to kill him, he's so afraid of the disease. He got me to reach down his horse pistol, so that he could have it ready."

Captain Clinton blinked, and regarded his hands on his knees.

"Um, as you say, somebody's got to look in. . . . That damn missionary'd do it, but I don't trust him. Speaks too many heathen languages. He'd have it all over the ship in no time. Still, I hate to see you going there. Only Christian I've got left."

He heaved himself to his feet, straightened his coat.

"I'll go there myself," he announced.

As Jasper started toward it, the cabin door was opened from the outside, a breach of decorum even the inebriated Ezra John Clinton would be unlikely to forgive. Dr. Wallace, closely followed by his sister, strode in. He was mincing, even obsequious, but he would not be that way long. He was coming again—Jasper knew it before a word was spoken—in as undiplomatic a manner as possible, to protest about the cargo. He knew that Captain Clinton would shout him down and at last drive him out, along with his sister, but he was coming just the same. He was a man with a mission, in more senses than one.

The pompous man began his harangue. Jasper slipped out.

He didn't like the sky. The glass was low, almost thirty, and the air was beset by squalls. He went to the helm. He knew the course, but he had not seen a chart since they left Singapore. Captain Clinton could be singularly secretive about such matters. However, the helmsman was keeping her on her course. Toby Loy, the impeccable bosun, who should have been there, wasn't—nor was either of his mates. Jasper asked after them in pidgin Hindustani, pidgin Malay, and pidgin Chinese-English, but the Lascar only shrugged. Jasper went forward.

As a matter of fact, Jasper wasn't supposed to be on duty—it wasn't his watch. The captain, however, preferred his cabin and his bottle. On a ship short of two officers, Jasper thought he'd better not quibble. At the same time, he'd better not let those Chinks do as they pleased.

As he crossed the deck, he heard the captain's voice raised high. The captain was getting angry sooner than usual. He was cursing the Reverend Dr. Wallace almost before hearing the missionary's whine. Though it was scarcely after noon, the sky hung low and very red, brick-red. The squallishness was passing. The *Hannah*, which a little earlier had been booming along, now scarcely moved. Lightning streamed across the sky. Thunder rumbled far away.

TOBY LOY came up from the forecastle and passed Jasper without any salute, almost without a glance. There was something curiously stiff in his gait, something fixed about his stare. Jasper turned, sniffing. Then he descended quickly.

The Lascars off-watch were not smoking. They were in a corner, not asleep but mutter-

ing among themselves. Jasper Green didn't like the way they looked at him, the way they fell silent.

The ones who were smoking were Chinese—the two tindals, or bosun's mates, the cabin boy, the aged crabbed comprador. Each was prone on his bunk; and the air was acrid.

"Been stealing from the cargo, eh?" snarled Jasper.

Nobody answered him. He examined each of the smokers in turn. He was not new to this work. Though he smoked nothing himself, not even tobacco, he had dragged dozens of sailors out of Oriental dives just before sailing-time, and he was familiar with their harmlessness, their vapid, self-satisfied pleased expressions. They would not stir, or even sing, but they'd smile pauselessly, and sometimes even giggle a little.

Of these, a tindal, the comprador, and the cabin boy were virtually unconscious. There would be no profit in raging at them. They'd only continue to smile inanely, their eyes bright. Soon they would fall into a twelve- or thirteen-hour sleep. The other tindal, whose services would be needed on deck soon, propped himself on one elbow, and with a deliciously empty grin, humming a little to himself, pried a bit of the black stuff from a ball of it wrapped in dried leaves. He twirled this greasy sticky stuff, and held it over the flame of a spirit lamp for a moment. Still beaming, he popped it into the bowl of his pipe, inhaled twice at great length, and then leaned his head back against a bare wall, trying to hold in the smoke as long as he could.

Jasper confiscated what was left of the opium. Even if he had not recognized it, he would have known that it was stolen from the cargo. He had searched the bags and boxes of everybody who was to occupy the forecastle, before they came aboard. But he recognized it anyway. This was Malwa, the best on the market, the rajahs' own opium. No wonder these cheap-den pipers couldn't stand it.

No, it would be useless to talk to them. Toby Loy, however, was another matter. He was probably the ringleader, too, for he'd brought the others to the ship. Also, he was the only one presently scheduled to be on duty. He had probably ventured to leave the deck for a few pipes because he assumed that the captain was drunk in his cabin while the third mate was asleep in his. Jasper found him chatting with the helmsman.

"God damn you, Toby, you've put both your mates out of commission for a whole day, just when we're going to need every man we have! You stole that black stuff yourself, I'll bet!"

Toby Loy looked at him gravely, not insolently. Comprehension and a little fear were in his eyes, and some hesitancy, as he paused, seeking an excuse, wondering whether to try a denial.

Jasper was ashamed of himself. Neither he nor any of his family had ever approved of swearing.

Jasper gave him no time to decide. Jasper punched his jaw, hard.

Toby Loy was a big man. He took two backward steps, but he didn't fall.

Jasper walked up to him and hit him again, and this time he went down on the deck.

"Another show like this and you'll wake up in irons!"

He made sure that the helmsman was keeping the course, and then he went to his own cabin. He was ashamed of himself. He felt the need of prayer, of asking forgiveness, and he got to his knees. This was not because he had slugged Toby Loy, who deserved at least that much punishment, but because of the way he had said, "God damn you!" Neither Jasper Green nor any member of his family had ever approved of swearing.

When he rose he heard somebody move in the next cabin, Mr. Lessing's. That could hardly be Mr. Lessing himself.

Jasper had started for the door when the shot was fired.

It made a terrific explosion in the narrow corridor. They must have heard it all over the ship.

Jasper hurried into Mr. Lessing's cabin. The captain was there, a shocked, scared man, trembling. The first mate was in his bunk, as Jasper had last seen him—except that a great deal of his head was torn off, and the rest of it

Jasper punched Toby Loy's jaw, hard. The bosun took two backward steps, then fell to the deck.

was blackened by powder. In his right hand he held a smoking horse pistol.

"He—he did it just as I came in."

CHAPTER II

MURDER ON THE HIGH SEAS

THEY slid Mr. Lessing's body, wrapped in sail cloth, into the South China Sea an hour and a half later. Dr. Wallace read something from his Bible, the hands standing by, staring without expression. There was no breath of breeze and the sky still lowered a mean harsh red. The *Hannah* rested motionless. The splash was great, and afterward the bubbles rose for a long while, as though the sea were a pond. Ezra John Clinton sidled up to Jasper Green.

"Seems crude to do it so soon," he whispered, "but you know my reason, don't you?"

"Sure," muttered Jasper. "Sure, I know your reason."

He had always liked Mr. Lessing.

Captain Clinton looked sideways at him a moment, then walked to his cabin. Jasper went back on watch.

Toby Loy was on deck, quiet as always, not sullen. Jasper was tolerably certain that whatever trouble might be brewing in the forecastle, the bosun and his Chinese associates were not mixed up in it. The Lascar hands indeed appeared to hate them. The Chinese had stolen some opium, yes, but perhaps the temptation had been too great. Jasper trusted the

Chinese. He did not trust the Lascars any more than Mr. Lessing had. They were quiet fellows ordinarily, but this particular group looked nasty. It had been hustled together too quickly at Singapore, after the crew from Calcutta, disliking Captain Clinton, had quit suddenly. Anything to beat the *Fairy*. The captain had been drunk, and when Mr. Lessing had remonstrated, the captain had bellowed for silence.

Jasper stole a glance now and then at Toby Loy. He rather admired the bosun. He was sorry there had been trouble, and he'd already decided that he would not report it to the captain. He wished he could tell Toby Loy he was sorry—not actually apologize, but just say it decently, as one man to another. That couldn't be done, of course. Discipline forbade it.

The captain came to the door of his cabin, roaring for the steward, who slept below in poppied bliss. Toby Loy called a man from aloft and sent him to the captain, and the man returned, after angry words, with his mouth all bloody. Ezra John Clinton could be nasty when he was drunk. The hand, not looking at Jasper, mumbled something to the bosun.

"The captain, 'e want see you, mastah."

"Thank you, Toby."

He glanced at the sky, not liking it. He glanced at the slack sails. Aloft already, the Lascar who'd been sent to the captain was jabbering with friends. Two of them started to come down, though Toby Loy had shouted no order.

"I don't like this breathlessness, Toby."

"Aye, mastah," he answered, probably not understanding the noun, but catching the note of worriment.

"There is maybe some catchum-up tlubble, Toby?"

The bosun looked at the sky.

"There?"

"Yes, there. Maybe here, too, Toby, eh?"

"Mebbe," said the bosun.

"Maybe catchum-up tlubble here, eh?"

"Mebbe."

Jasper Green sighed. Life at sea was so uncertain, so risky. As he moved away, he spoke again, quietly, out of a corner of his mouth.

"I'm trusting you, Toby. You were a fool to swipe that mud, but I'm trusting you now. Savvy?"

"Savvy, mastah," confirmed Toby Loy, and saluted.

Ezra John Clinton had Mr. Lessing's seachest open before him, and he had the papers spread. He barked at Jasper, "Close that door! Now—I want to ask you something, Mister."

Jasper Green saluted.

"A little while ago I said to you that you knew why I'd ordered poor Mr. Lessing's burial so quick. And you answered, sure you did. You said that in a funny voice, Mister."

Jasper did not reply. The captain, he saw, was soberer. The captain was more afraid than ever, too; he knew that he was going to have to put the bottle aside, and his nerves were bad.

"Just what did you mean by that?"

"I supposed that you understood, sir."

"Um. I supposed I did, too—until I got to thinking it over." He leaned forward, with an effort keeping his voice low. "Just what *did* you mean by it, then?"

Well, Jasper was tired. He'd had very little sleep, and the strain of events was nicking his oaken frame. He took a deep breath, started one answer, checked himself before any word emerged, and waxed blunt. It felt better to talk straight-out.

"What I meant, sir, was that perhaps you didn't want Dr. Wallace and myself to write too detailed a report."

"Report on what, Mister?"

"On the way Mr. Lessing's body was found. The position."

Captain Clinton's head did not move, nor did his shoulders, nor his hands. Only—he swallowed visibly. After a while, "Are you implying, Mr. Green, that Mr. Lessing did not kill himself?"

Jasper said nothing.

"You told me yourself," the captain went on, and now he leaned back, always watching Jasper's face, "that you'd taken down his horse pistol at his own request, and placed it next to him."

"Yes, sir."

"You told me that he believed himself to have contracted bubonic plague, as he probably had. You know that he certainly knew that if he had it he would die in horrible pain."

"Yes, sir."

"You know that that silly story about the cabin boy is something Mr. Lessing might have made up simply for the purpose of getting you to hand him down a pistol he was too weak to reach."

"Yes, sir."

"Then what on earth, Mr. Green, makes you so foolish as to suggest that possibly Mr. Lessing did not kill himself?"

Jasper started, "The gun was in his right hand—"

"Yes."

"Have you forgotten, sir, that Mr. Lessing was left-handed?"

Captain Clinton sat staring at him for a long while. His mouth remained open. Only his eyes changed. They were crowded now, to the exclusion of everything else, with stark fear.

"You will make a report?" he whispered, after a while.

Jasper shrugged.

The captain got to his feet, moving slowly. Cunning came back with tiny lights into his eyes. His lips twitched.

"One man's word against another's, Mister. Dr. Wallace found us both there. Lessing was

left-handed, yes. And you could testify that the pistol was found in his right hand. So could Dr. Wallace. Have you spoken to him about this?"

Unthinkingly, "No, sir."

The captain even succeeded in bringing up a smile.

"I could testify to that myself, if need be. That he was left-handed, yes, as I remember now. And also that the pistol was found in his right hand. You may leave now, Mister."

Jasper saluted and started to leave. He walked backward. The captain really did smile then, and the smile wasn't pleasant.

"There is no reason for you to worry, Mister. Not unless Dr. Wallace suddenly begins to remember."

All the time staring at Jasper, he tapped a paper. "In that case, Mr. Lessing's effects will be of peculiar interest to the examiners, I guess. He may not have mentioned it, but he was a bachelor, and he left his shares in the *Hannah* to you." He tapped the paper again. "Four shares in this tub, Mister, if we beat the *Fairy*, are going to be worth lots. But I wouldn't take ten thousand dollars to have them made out in my name. You may leave."

THE sky was a darker red, after dark, but still it showed surly and threatening, and still there was no breeze. Wan wavelets, pinked by the ceiling's light, listlessly touched the sides of the bark.

Jasper had slept a few hours, his door locked, a loaded pistol by his side, before he went up.

"Good evening, sir."

"Good night, Mr. Green. Same course."

"Thank you, sir."

The captain went with a steady walk to his cabin. The third mate was not comforted by that walk. *Just* sober, just *getting* sober, Ezra John Clinton could be his worst. Repentance, if he felt it at the end of a splurge, in his outward manner took the form of additional nastiness—as though he blamed all the rest of the world, rather than himself, for the way he felt. His calmness now, to one who knew him, was ominous.

Jasper leaned against the rail.

"I don't like it," he said to the water and Toby Loy. "Do they talk about him below?"

"Aye. No likee."

"No likee you fellows-boy either, do they?"

"Aye. No likee. No likee China-boy."

Toby Loy had been on duty throughout the captain's double watch. Feeling guilty about the theft of opium, feeling himself to blame for his compatriots' unconsciousness, he took all their work upon his own shoulders. Well, those were large shoulders. Toby Loy was squat, but very broad, very powerful and, it would seem, untiring. He must have known that Jasper had failed to report the pipe episode, and he was probably grateful. Jasper sensed in him a wistful desire to express regret for his crime—impossible, of course, because of discipline and the difference in their stations. All the same, Jasper liked and trusted Toby Loy more than ever.

There was a lot of work up here, too, or had been. Captain Clinton, at his worst a great sailor, had not been blind to the threat of the skies. He'd kept Toby Loy barking commands. Jasper, gazing aloft, saw that while he slept all stunsail booms had been got in off the yards, the topgallant masts had been lowered, the jibboom rigger in, the stern boat hoisted onto the poop, all hatches battened down, and canvas shortened to fore and main trysails and fore staysail.

God only knew what would come out of weather like this, but if a blow came, it would not catch the *Hannah* unprepared.

There was a step, and Miss Wallace was beside him.

"I wonder if you can tell me where we are, Mr. Green?"

"Good evening, ma'am." He straightened and touched his cap. "I'm afraid I don't know."

"Really?" She looked at him. "I thought officers always—"

"Well, I know we're headed due north a point east. I know that we should be somewhere off the center of the Paracels. The Old—the captain would probably lay a course as close to them as he dared."

"What are the Paracels?"

"Reefs. Well, anyway, reefs and nigger-heads and mushrooms and grindy-sand, all jamboree'd up. Breakers in some places, but mostly nothing wrong until you're plumb on top of them. The Pratas are bad enough, and nobody in his right mind goes near them, though they're only a ring of coral around a lot of spits. But the Paracels go for more than a hundred miles north-and-south and close to seventy-five east-and-west, so they say. Not lighted—nothing here's lighted—and not charted, naturally. Well, as I say, I don't know our exact position, but I figure the captain's sailed as close to the Paracels as possible, for distance-saving."

"Aren't you afraid that he might sail *too* close?"

Jasper Green shook his head.

"You can spread this on your spuds and eat it, ma'am: drunk or sober, there isn't a better navigator alive."

"I see. Does he teach you things about the ship?"

"Oh, sure. There's not much you don't know when you've sailed under Ezra Clinton. He even takes me ashore with him sometimes. And say, it's a great thing to watch him work! He wheedles and bullies and pats-on-the-back, and then he pretends to throw the whole thing up, and he lights a cigar, and calls for drinks. But he doesn't drink much! Not at that stage

of the game! He *talks* in buckets, but he *drinks* in thimbles—until he's got them!"

"And do you drink with him, Mr. Green?"

"Sometimes. When I see that he wants me to get the others talking. I don't care much for liquor, but I figure it's what a man has to do if he wants to be an importer and exporter in China."

She saw that she had him interested at last, this glum distant young man, so she asked a lot of questions, intelligent questions, about the way businessmen did business in Canton, in Singapore, in Malacca, Penang, Calcutta. He responded eagerly, glad to find a foreigner—a female, at that!—who took any interest in such important matters. He told her about the godowns and factories of Canton, which were English, Dutch, French, Swedish, Portuguese, even American; about the Chinese customs laws; about anchorages off Lintin and Macao and Hong Kong, and the Whampoa anchorage closer in; about the extraordinary honesty of the Hong merchants, as well as the appalling inefficiency of the officials; about the million-dollar-teacup agreements, as well as the inevitable and sometimes over-severe squeeze; about the local organizations of the Honorable East India Company, which he called the John Company, and Jardine-Matheson, Russel and Co., Carr, Tagore and Co., the Dents, the Forbes . . .

"But not for me. Too much what's-your-family. Too much dead-man's-shoes. I'll start up for myself."

"On money wrung from the sufferings of the downtrodden!"

She said this passionately but quietly, and as though to herself. But there was annoyance in him when he glanced at her. He'd just begun to think that she had some sense, after all, and he had been finding it pleasant to lean on the rail and talk about matters so close to his heart. She'd have a head for that sort of work, if it were only possible to think of a woman in business. But she had whined, spoiling it.

She knew this. She was quick to sense his change of feeling.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. "I was thinking of my brother and how shocked he is. He believes that Mr. Lessing's death may have been caused by some curse on this boat because of what it carries."

"He does, eh?"

"Yes. And I know he'll use that as an argument when he goes to remonstrate with the captain again, in a little while."

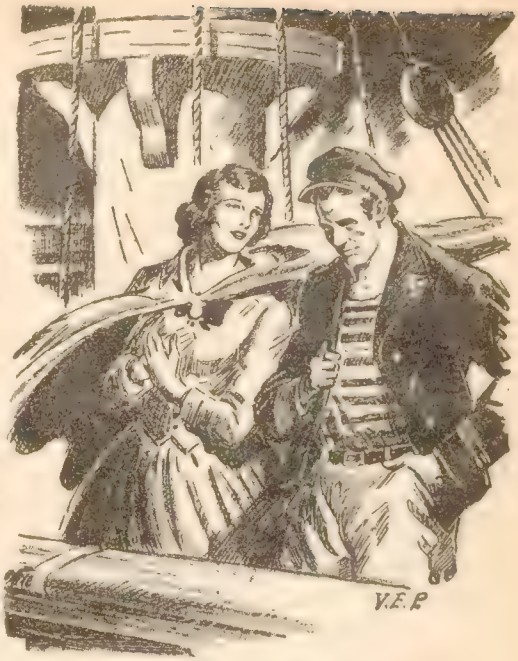
Jasper groaned, then straightened, and touched his cap.

"I'm sorry, ma'am. That wasn't polite of me."

"Oh, it's all right. I realize how hard it must be for you, with so few officers. You must have all sorts of troubles."

"Yes, I guess we do."

"My brother, after all, only wants the captain to do what is right. He only wants that horrid drug to be thrown into the sea."



"I'd like to throw all the horrid drug overboard," Miss Wallace said passionately.

"Oh, is that all?"

"Well, it would be the decent thing to do."

"Say, that opium belongs to other parties . . . And do you know how much we're carrying? There's six hundred chests down there." He tapped the deck with his toe. "Hundred catties a chest, see?"

"I'd like to throw them all overboard!"

"You'd have a job, ma'am. A hundred catties is one hundred and thirty-some-odd pounds. And the chests themselves weigh plenty."

Dr. Wallace tripped toward them and remarked upon the beauty of the night—to Jasper's astonishment, for this was surely one of the meanest nights he'd ever known—and asked his sister if he might speak to her. They went off a little, and Jasper lurched to the binnacle and made sure that the *Hannah* was on her course.

CHAPTER III

THE SMELL OF BLOOD

THE cargo was the only thing that kept him from talking properly with Miss Wallace, from getting really well acquainted. He was a lonesome lad, Jasper Green, though he seldom admitted this to himself, and indeed

Toby Loy was as clear-headed and knowing as any bosun anywhere.

he often wasn't aware of it; and the company of Miss Wallace, except when she blew off her religious hoots, was unexpectedly agreeable. If she'd only go on asking about counting-houses, and the way you calculated your possibility-of-loss, and the way you dickered for a reduction of insurance rates . . . After all, what was so frightful about opium? Jasper didn't go for the stuff himself, because he didn't have time for such pleasures, if they were pleasures. But if the Chinks liked it, why not let them have it? The Chinks certainly were not moral or physical wrecks! Jasper had met hundreds of them, and by and large, he thought, though certainly they were heathen and had some strange habits, they were as healthy and happy a crowd as you were likely to meet.

Toby Loy, now, right here, was as clear-headed and knowing as any bosun anywhere. Toby Loy could smoke all the black mud he wanted, as long as he did it at the right time—and didn't steal.

"You catchum-up sleep soon. You flens finish sleep soon."

"Aye," said Toby Loy.

Dr. Wallace had moved quietly away, and Miss Wallace came back to Jasper.

"We were talking about how the Hong merchants make contracts, Mr. Green."

"Oh. Listen, that brother of yours isn't going to the captain alone, is he?"

"Yes. You see, he thought that perhaps my presence at the previous interviews—Oh, I don't mean anything wrong! The captain has been a perfect gentleman, but we didn't win our point before, and my brother thought that perhaps if we changed our tactics . . . He wants to try everything. And he's not used to failure, Mr. Green. He's a very persuasive person."

"He'd need to be, to get Ezra Clinton to chuck out half-a-million dollars' worth of cargo!"

"Yes, of course you think in terms of American dollars, while I think in terms of the pound sterling. But let me ask you: You said that everything in Canton was reckoned in silver, and you mentioned the two different kinds, Sycee silver and bar silver, but you didn't make clear the difference between those two forms."

"Forms, that's it. Bar silver's in bars. Sycee silver comes in little chunks the shape of a woman's slipper. No difference in quality. Not if you deal with the right house."

"Well, in that case, since you tell me that silver's practically all you carry back to India, and the Sycee silver takes up more room, why not insist upon the bars?"

"Space isn't what we're thinking of when we're going back. We always go back loaded to the gunnals, and still plenty of *room* below."

"But suppose you were to stop carrying this horrible drug and looked around for a different cargo? If you didn't have as much silver to carry back as you have now, that trifle of extra space might mean something, mightn't it?"

He shrugged. "A couple of cases of tea, maybe," he granted.

"Did anybody ever give away a couple of cases of tea? If, when you set up in business in Canton, as I hope you will, Mr. Green, since you want to so much—if then you have established a reputation for insisting upon bar silver—"

The woman was smart! Of course it was no more than a matter of convenience, which silver you took. But if, as she suggested, you got the Chinks to know that you wouldn't take it in any way but bars—"Did anybody ever *give away* a couple of cases of tea?" Say, she shouldn't be a missionary!

They moved together to the rail.

JASPER was worried about that fool Wallace, and was listening for the first sounds of an outburst. Wallace couldn't possibly have chosen a worse time to approach and reproach the captain, who had just gone off a trying double watch. To suggest to such a man, who knew it was his own, that God's

hand had struck Lessing dead—well, Jasper would not have been amazed if the captain were to throw Wallace out of his cabin physically. Jasper didn't think he'd blame the captain if he did.

Dr. Wallace, Jasper supposed, was heroic and exactly the kind of man who, a few centuries earlier when saints were fashionable, would have been a saint. He fairly begged to be reviled and sacrificed for the sake of what he believed right. He was forever butting into other peoples' business with a smile so forgiving that it was itself an insult. He insisted on spreading the light if it killed him, as he rather hoped it would. He really was worried about Dr. Wallace.

The girl was, too. For all her talk, or perhaps because of it, he sensed that, like him, she was half-listening for sounds of assault.

"I get your point about bar silver. You really ought to be in business yourself, except of course you couldn't be."

"I always have been interested in business, in handling money. If it should please God to take my brother away before his time, what I might do, in search of consolation, would be to marry some businessman. I could help him greatly."

"You sure could!"

"But meanwhile it's just a hobby, as you might say. Mr. Green, you mentioned that the ship's manifests and so forth were handled by Chinese, by a comprador and one or two schroffs. Do we have any of these aboard?"

"No schroffs. Couldn't pick up any. We do have a comprador. A very old fellow. Can't remember his name. He's pretty good except that sometimes he—Well, he has a few bad habits, but not in bookkeeping. Naturally his accounts can be checked by the officers at any time, and I've been doing most of that work, because it interests me. He keeps a beautiful ledger."

"The books are kept in the captain's cabin?" she asked, trying not to look there.

"No. The comprador keeps them himself, in the forecastle. We're so short-handed that there's some room. A good comprador anyway would probably prefer to sleep with his ledgers."

"Oh, then I couldn't see them. I suppose he's asleep right now?"

"I suppose he is," grimly. "But it's about time he woke up anyway. I'll go get 'em."

Toby Loy, the tireless, gave him a salute, and Jasper paused.

"I'm going below for something, and I'll wake up one of your mates. Give you a chance to catchum-up some shuteye, eh?"

"I sure thankee kindly, mastah," said Toby Loy, whose English was likely to suggest at once the East End of London, the northern end of Ireland, the tip end of Cape Cod.

The only light in the forecastle came from the flame of the spirit lamp the smokers had used.

There was an odd smell. Jasper, pausing inside the doorway, could not identify it. It was particularly odd, if only in that it could penetrate the other odors and make itself noticed, for this forecastle, as might have been expected, was crowded with the stink of stale sweat, dirt, drying clothes, unaired blankets; and in addition, now, there remained a faint sweet smell of opium. Still there was something else, something Jasper couldn't place. He stood a moment, puzzled, sniffing.

No puff of air, but simply the expiration of the fuel caused the flame to waver suddenly, shaking the shadows loose so that they rioted on the walls, and then go out.

Before this happened, Jasper had observed that though the four Chinese smokers remained prone in their bunks, the bunks of the others, the Lascars, all appeared vacant. This was curious, for it was half an hour yet before the change of watch, and he had not noticed any of the hands sleeping on deck.

He began to feel a bit afraid.

He went forward with arms outstretched, and one by one he touched the bunks, empty bunks, and patted empty blankets.

He stooped, reaching out to the bunk he knew to be occupied by the comprador. He felt the comprador's chest, and his fingers spider-walked up to a neck that was wet and sticky. He took his hands away slowly. It was so dark that he couldn't see them even when he held them before his face. But he knew at last what it was he smelled. It was blood.

He felt for and found each of the other Chinese, and each, like the comprador, lay dead. Each had passed away while asleep, entoiled in the fuzzy warm folds of his drug.

Standing in the darkness, his hands and wrists greasy with blood, Jasper Green felt an impulse to pray.

But there might not be time for prayer. He scrambled up the ladder to the deck.

"Murder! Mutiny! Murder!"

THE bark lay motionless, her canvas furled, in a flat sea. The air was chill and still, and though the sky was murky there was some light. You might have supposed that a yell like that—for Jasper Green had strong lungs—would raise excitement. It didn't. As a matter of fact, it went unheeded, save for a couple of Lascars clinging to the lower fore shrouds. Those who were aft did not even hear it.

The Lascars in the shrouds had knives in their mouths. Jasper didn't see these men.

The captain's cabin was the only substantial

structure above decks on the *Hannah*. It was a square house just forward of the wheel, and had doors both forward and aft. These doors, in a line, both were open, and the lamp in the cabin was bright so that Jasper could see through the cabin to the wheel, where a scared helmsman stood with Toby Loy, impassive as a statue, behind him.

Framed in the after doorway stood Miss Wallace. She was screaming.

Even more noise issued from the throat of Ezra John Clinton, and it was his bull's roar, rather than her screaming, which accounted for the fact that nobody aft had heard Jasper.

Captain Clinton had completely lost control of himself. He was bellowing like a madman. He stood in the middle of his cabin, and every now and then swung a great fist into the face of Dr. Wallace. That face already was red, pulpy, spongy. The missionary never took a backward step, except when a blow staggered him. Once he went to his knees, but he rose promptly. He did not turn, or lift his hands, or try to duck. His mouth was moving, and he was trying to say something. Jasper, running aft, could not see the man's eyes, but doubtless they were lit with exaltation. Thank heaven, he was being a martyr at last! He was having a wonderful time.

All this Jasper saw in a flash, as he came abaft the foremast. He saw something else, too, something seen by none of those others —the captain, the martyr, poor Miss Wallace, Toby Loy, the helmsman—though the helmsman might have known that they were there. He saw, silhouetted against the murky sky, the figures of at least five Lascars on the roof of the cabin house. They were just above the doors. It was clear what they were doing. They were waiting for the captain to emerge from one of those doors, so that they could fall upon him with knives. No doubt they had planned to create some false excitement, to fake an alarm, in order to bring him out on the run.

If they ever killed Ezra Clinton and got into that cabin, the *Hannah* would be lost. There was a vast store of cannister and grape, and a powder magazine well filled, to take care of the *Hannah's* outside armory—four eighteen-pounders, two on each side, and astern a pivot gun, a long-barreled Armstrong sixty-eight-pounder. But the only small firearms, aside from Jasper's pistol, which he was drawing as he ran, were six muskets and four pistols. These, together with half-a-dozen cutlasses, were all stored in the captain's cabin.

It was as Jasper came abaft the foremast that the two Lascars dropped on him.

He was on the deck before he realized what had happened. Something burned the top of his right shoulder, but he threshed around wildly, kicking, punching as best he could with his left fist. With his right hand he had fully drawn the pistol and he slammed right and left with it. He did not shoot the pistol, for fear of shooting himself or setting his clothes afire.

He never had a chance to be afraid of the knives, for he didn't even see them, until he had stunned one Lascar with a lucky backhand pistol blow, and at almost the same instant kicked the other in the groin. The fight was over. It had lasted scarcely a minute.

Jasper rose. He took time only to stun the first Lascar additionally with a hard kick to the jaw. The other man was writhing and squealing in pain, his walnut face green at the lips and around the eyes. He wouldn't take part in any fight for some time to come! Jasper ran on.

He could see that Miss Wallace had entered the cabin, was grappling with the captain, striving to push him away from her brother, who stood motionless, bleeding, aglow. Somebody, some one of the three, would leave that cabin soon—and be pounced upon from above.

Jasper opened his mouth to yell, but something struck his left knee, stinging him, so that his legs tangled. He had been running hard, and he fell hard. He rose. He never did learn what it was that hit him. Probably somebody had thrown a belaying pin.

Now he got back his voice.

"Mutiny! Stay in there! Murder!"

Miss Wallace had stopped her screaming, the captain his bellowing, and Toby Loy heard this cry. Through the cabin, Jasper could see the bosun start away from the wheel. Jasper also saw the helmsman take a knife from his sash and start after Toby Loy. Then the three in the cabin moved to obscure his view.

The captain, crying, "What's this?" started through the forward cabin door. He was hatless. Over the door, scant inches above his head, a crouched Lascar raised a belaying pin.

"Go back, sir! Don't come out!"

Jasper was close now. He did not stop when he fired. He was close enough to risk a running shot.

The pin fell, but slackly on the captain's shoulder, and the Lascar fell after it, landing on deck at the captain's feet.

Ezra John Clinton's mouth was wide open, his eyes bugged out. For a split second, it seemed, he had supposed that the sweating, running blood-smeared Jasper meant to shoot him in the face. When the sailor tumbled from the roof, it must have been almost a relief.

"What the hell—"

"Get back in, sir!"

The captain whirled around, stepping away

from the door. He saved his life when he did that. A second belaying pin, in the fist of a second Lascar, missed his skull by inches. The captain roared with rage. He would have climbed to the roof of the deckhouse and whipped the Lascar with his bare hands, had not Jasper reached him just then. Jasper wasted no time in words. Without ceremony he pushed the captain into the cabin, jumped in after him, and slammed and latched the door.

CHAPTER IV

WITH CUTLASSES AND COURAGE

THE Wallaces were staring at him, as the captain was doing. The captain was so flabbergasted that he wasn't even angry. His breath came in gasps. His face was rufous, purpling at the cheeks.

"Now if you'll kindly explain—"

"Sorry to be so abrupt, sir. We appear to have a mutiny on our hands. The bosun's tindals, the comprador and the cabin boy have all been murdered in their sleep. Throats cut. The men are all over the ship, but mostly aloft, I think. Toby—"

He moved so that he could see out the after door. He had forgotten Toby L y's predicament.

The bosun must have been warned by some sixth sense, and had turned before the helmsman could knife him. Now he held the helmsman's wrist in his strong yellow hand, and the helmsman screamed in pain.

Lascars thudded down from the deckhouse, landing like cats, and ran toward Toby. The bosun deliberately broke the helmsman's arm over a thick knee. He lifted the helmsman, who was small enough, in both hands. It looked as though he were going to throw him at the approaching Lascars. The helmsman wasn't struggling, for he'd fainted from pain, and to Toby Loy he was a mere sack of clothes. However, he might be useful as something besides a missile. Toby Loy half turned, and with the greatest deliberation pitched the helmsman clear over the rigged-in stern boat, over the taffrail, and into the sea.

It was an act of the most cold-blooded brutality, and it stopped the Lascars in their tracks. As they wavered, overwhelmed by what they had seen, Toby Loy whipped out his sheath knife.

They might have retreated, so frightened and awed were they, but Toby Loy gave them no chance. There were four or five of them, and more were appearing all the time, dropping from the deckhouse, dropping from the rigging, clambering down the ratlines, but the bosun took the offensive.

In an instant the afterdeck was a scene of high madness. Toby Loy, snorting, snarling, roaring, charged in and out, this way and that, a bull baited by frantic terriers. The Lascars edged close to him, skipped away. They wriggled up to him on their bellies and tried to catch his ankles. They threw belaying pins at him. He never lost his head. Had he charged directly, as they tried to get him to do, *then* he would have been away from the rail and they would have surrounded him.

"This calls for cutlasses, Mr. Green."

"Yes, sir."

There was a rack of them near the door. Jasper took one, but Ezra John Clinton took two, one in each hand. Ezra John Clinton, as became his station, was the first out of the cabin, and the bewildered Lascars found a second bull at their rear.

"Shut the door and lock it!" cried Jasper over his shoulder. "Don't let anybody in!"

For a little while it was simply a slaughter, not a battle at all. Toby Loy, with perfect timing, though he was beset on three sides and had only his fists and a small sheath knife, and though he couldn't really have seen what was happening but only sensed it, chose this moment to leave the rail and wade into the ranks of the hands.

They broke. They scattered this way and that. There were upwards of a dozen of them, and each was armed with a long sharp knife —but what good were knives against cutlasses? They saw their companions fall, and they started to run.

Captain Clinton laid about him right and left. Sometimes he cut, sometimes he hit with the flat, and often he struck nothing but empty air. Jasper Green, for such was his nature, was more methodical. He made each vicious blow count. He never used the flat. He struck to kill. He wanted to be sure, as he advanced, that the men he left behind him would not rise up.

The Lascars rallied. Partly this might have been because others had joined them, partly because somebody had smashed open a deck locker and passed out four axes, formidable weapons as long, if not as handy, as a cutlass. Mostly it must have been prompted by desperation. They simply couldn't surrender now! They knew something about maritime law, knew at least what murder on the high seas meant.

Doubtless they had planned to take over the ship, kill all Chinese, officers, and passengers, and make for one of the Paracels, there to dispose of ship and cargo to some pirate band, part of the price being an agreement to get them, the Lascars, back to Singapore. Aside from the value of the cargo, a fast bark like the *Hannah*, with its carronades and long-tom, with its big powder magazine, would be a godsend to pirates in a remote place. But if three

men could block this, and scare the mutineers into surrendering, then they were as good as hanged. They were all in it. None would be spared. This wasn't like a fight on land. They'd started it, and, frightened though they were, they knew that they must finish it—or be finished.

It was the captain they hated, and it was the captain they concentrated on. They did not try to down him by assault. They didn't try to push him back, or even hold him. Their tactics remained terrier tactics. They egged him on. Slashing, slashing, he followed as they fell away. The battle was moving forward, and the captain was far ahead of his support.

TOBY LOY and Jasper Green, moving along the larboard and starboard rails respectively, were aggressive without being foolish. They meant, as the captain did, to force the whole pack of Lascars forward, and if the Lascars didn't surrender when cornered in the bow, to cut them down. But they moved warily. They made sure as they went that they were not exposing themselves to attack from above.

The captain was not so cautious. Fairly chasing them now, and drunk with excitement, he let himself be led to the place under the strapped boom. It was a stunsail boom, and it had been brought in that very afternoon under his own orders as part of the preparation against the blow which still seemed imminent. It should have been lowered to the deck and lashed amidships with the others. Perhaps it had been, and perhaps the Lascars had quietly raised it to the yard again. Or it might have been left up there, by accident or design. Whatever the reason, it was not well strapped. It was easily released.

The Lascars sprang back. Jasper saw the boom falling, and yelled. Toby Loy yelled. Even Dr. and Miss Wallace, who had disobeyed Jasper's command and not only failed to close the after door of the cabin but opened the forward door—even they saw the boom teeter and fall. Everybody but the man underneath saw it.

It was eight feet long and must have weighed three hundred pounds. It must have broken his shoulders and arms immediately, and probably, it broke his back. He starfished upon the deck, arms and legs outthrust.

The Lascars sprang in. Up and down they swung the axes, hacking not at the boom but at what remained of Ezra John Clinton, at his head and shoulders, his buttocks, his legs.

Jasper put his left hand on the rail and nearly was sick. Even Toby Loy, that excellent fighting man, paled. Miss Wallace, in the doorway, leaned against the lintel, and then she slithered in a faint to her knees. Dr. Wallace, however, ran to the scene.

"You mustn't do that! Please remember what it says in—"

The nearest Lascar looked up from his hacking, and grinned a broad grin. He lifted his axe again, turning.

Jasper sprang forward. Toby Loy sprang forward.

"After all, he may have had his faults but that's no way to—"

Dr. Wallace talked right to the end. He never moved, his voice never wavered. He no more tried to evade this blow, which he must have known was going to kill him, than he had tried to evade the blows of the man whose body he now was trying to save from desecration.

It made a hideous sound. Fortunately Miss Wallace never heard it. She still knelt against the door in a swoon.

Jasper reached the body as the Lascar was bringing up the axe for another blow. Jasper ran him through the belly.

Toby Loy arrived then, barely in time, for three other axemen approached, swinging their weapons like scythes. Toby Loy's appearance gave Jasper a chance to catch his breath.

"No standee, Toby. We catchum-up gunee."

"Fight the bloody bahstids!"

"With guns, yes. Now back, not fast. Keep facing them."

It was the axes which had caused Captain Jasper Green to change his plans, now that he was in charge. He and Toby were Miss Wallace's only protection.

And back of his reasoning was Jasper's awareness that a musket or pistol is a more effective weapon than any cutlass. When guns were produced the Lascars would know that they were licked.

So he ordered a retreat.

Toby Loy either did not understand or preferred to disobey. Perhaps Toby was too excited to stop. Perhaps, with his fine instinct for battle, he sensed that here was the turning-point, the point when, against all reason, attack should be pressed.

At any rate, he attacked. Jasper couldn't desert him.

The Lascars broke and ran. Suddenly there was no fight left in them. Toby Loy's instinct had been sound. Never disciplined, always jittery, now abruptly the Lascars were again as they had been on the poop when, facing Toby Loy, they were set upon from the rear by the late Ezra John Clinton. This time, however, they were given no chance to rally. They were fewer, too, this time: the cutlasses had not been used in vain.

Even the axemen threw down their axes. Some went to their knees. Some made for the forecastle, where they would be hopelessly

trapped. Others swarmed up the ratlines, None went back toward the captain's cabin, where Miss Wallace knelt. None could—without passing close to the terrible Jasper Green, the terrible Toby Loy.

The rout was complete. The Lascars were utterly demoralized.

Jasper went to work, then, grimly, not joyously, like Toby Loy. A few he spared, those who pleaded on their knees and who obviously were unarmed. He made them lie down with their hands behind their heads. Some he did not need to kill—one who jumped over the rail when Jasper approached, for instance, and one who, chased up the foremast rigging, slipped while trying to get out on a spar and fell to the deck, landing on his head. Toby Loy, however, spared nobody.

Jasper did accept the surrender of those who had taken refuge in the forecastle. There were only three of them. He made them come up the ladder one by one, then crawl on their bellies along the deck to where the other prisoners lay. Toby Loy would have cracked their skulls, one by one, as they emerged, but Jasper pointed out, snappishly and a little wearily, that they'd need hands to sail the ship. Toby Loy obeyed orders this time.

Chained to the foremast were the six Lascars who had survived the mutiny.

WHEN Jasper awoke it was near noon, and he rose hastily, for he wanted to take a noon sight if possible. It didn't look promising from the light that came through the ports—a nasty brick-red glow, similar to that which had been cast the night before, and almost as dim.

He saw with a start that Miss Wallace no longer was in the captain's bunk, where he'd stowed her last night when finally he quieted her. She had not had hysterics, though she'd been close to them. Did she have them now, a delayed action? Was she at this moment trying to burn or otherwise damage the cargo?

For of course she had laid all the trouble to the cargo. *It* was to blame, and nothing else. *It* had killed her brother. She had demanded peremptorily that it be dumped overboard, every last chest of it. And when Jasper had tried to explain that this was impossible at the moment, even if he were to consent to such a dishonest act, she had flared up again and shrieked that he was nothing but a wicked smuggler himself. He had tried to quiet her. But he had been scarcely able to stand, what with exhaustion and the heavy loss of blood. Groggy, nearing the end of his patience, he had pointed out that if she were to eat or smoke a little of that cargo herself, right now, sheerly for its medicinal properties. . .

It was then that she had really blown her top, screaming that he was a smuggler and thief, and that she wouldn't touch the filthy stuff, no matter how much he urged her. She had even tried to hit him with her fists. He'd had a great deal of difficulty getting her quiet, getting her into the bunk. He had slept on the floor beneath the bunk, in the hope that if she needed him in the night she would call him. He could have slept as soundly on the bowsprit or hanging head-low from a yard, he was so tired.

Now she was gone. Perhaps she had never slept at all? He tightened his clothes, and hurriedly went out on deck.

It was clean, or comparatively clean. The invaluable, the incomparable Toby Loy had cleared it, competently chucking bodies overboard, while Jasper had sewn the bodies of the captain and Dr. Wallace in separate sheets of canvas. Toby Loy had even seemed to enjoy his work. Jasper, sewing, trying to stay awake, too tired even to be horrified, had wondered once, wanly, whether all those the bosun tossed overboard were in fact dead. He had cautioned Toby about this. "Allee samee dead," the bosun had cheerfully replied.

The deck was clean now. It did not glisten, as it would have in ordinary times under the eye of Ezra John Clinton; it had not been swabbed, it hadn't been holystoned, but at least the blood had been mopped up. The boom which had squashed Captain Clinton had been cleaned and lashed to its place on deck.

The bark, so still in flat red water and seemingly all deserted, had an eerie shimmer. Though the morning was warm, Jasper Green, emerging from the cabin, shivered.

Toby Loy was not in sight. Forward, chained to the foremast with both leg and arm chains, were the six Lascars who had survived. They crouched like frightened animals, whimpering.

Jasper noticed with amazement that the number four hatch, the one nearest him, was open. Then he saw that Miss Wallace was in the hatch, standing on top of the neatly stowed opium chests. She was not far down, in the 'tweendecks. She had hauled one of the chests halfway out of the hatch, but evidently she'd found it beyond her strength to get it onto the deck. Now she had an axe, and she was hacking at it, gasping, sobbing as she did so.

She could not possibly have opened the hatch alone, knocked out all those blocks, removed the boards and heavy strips, hauled back the tarpaulin. She must have talked Toby Loy into doing that work—wheedled him with heaven only knew what fantastic story.

The empty hatch might have meant a wrecked ship, had a blow come suddenly. Jasper went cold inside his belly when he thought of it. He'd have Toby Loy's hide for this!

As for the immediate damage that Miss Wallace was doing, it was negligible. The chest was teak, and brass-bound. The axe had been blunted. Exhausted as she was, she might as well have been beating a boulder with a stick of bamboo.

He walked to her.

"I'm afraid you're wasting your time," he said gently.

He thought that she might try to hit him. He was prepared for this. He was not prepared to have her drop the axe, and wheel, sobbing, and throw her arms around him.

"Oh, Mr. Green, I'm sorry! But that stuff must go! I—I shouldn't have . . . I've treated you shamefully . . . And you've been so good! But it must go! I'll throw it overboard myself! I'll—"

When she tried to get away from him he held her, as much from amazement as anything else. His head was in a whirl.

"Let me go! I'm going to . . . You've been kind, Mr. Green, but I won't stay on this boat until all that stuff has been—"

He lifted her easily, for she was a slight thing. She struggled, but she hadn't a kitten's strength left. Staring straight ahead, heedless of her sobs, and walking like a man who wades through water, he carried her back to the cabin and put her in the bunk.

The physical exertion had been good for her, better than anything else could have been. Soon she was asleep.

He gazed at her for a while, still feeling flustered. He saw again, swallowing, as though for the first time, that she was a very lovely woman.

He prayed a little, kneeling by the side of the bunk, and asked for strength.

HE loaded two pistols. When he went out he locked the cabin door. He studied the Lascars. They were a sorry lot, the weaklings, the tools of others. They would probably do anything they were told to do, now. Yet they were thinly desperate, knowing, each of them, what sentence was meted out to mutineers. Properly guarded, they would do certain work, but they'd be no good in an emergency.

He picked the weakest and meekest, and unshackled him. He backed away, drew a pistol, tossed the freed man the key, and in sign language ordered him to release the others.

He would not summon Toby Loy, who deserved his sleep.

Twenty minutes later, the slightly chipped opium chest was back in its place among the others, and the number four hatch was battened down to Jasper's satisfaction. A pistol always pointed, he marched them back to the foremast. He had the meekest one shackle the others. Then he shackled the meekest one.

When he left them they were groveling, moaning a little.

Jasper did not go below, but he did go over the deck, making sure than everything was shipshape, and paying particular attention to the hatches and to the powder magazine, a sunken locker amidships.

The idle wheel, which didn't even swing inches, gave him the creeps. He tried to avoid looking at it.

When he returned to the cabin he let himself in very quietly. She was still asleep. Peace had fallen upon the features of her face as her muscles relaxed, her nerves settled, and she was lovelier than ever. Not really beautiful, perhaps—he supposed her nose was a little too uptilted. He wished that she would open her eyes, so he could see them again.

After a while he went to the chart rack. Noon was gone, and he had not even tried to shoot the sun, hopelessly smogged. But when the calm had halted them, the previous afternoon, Ezra John Clinton was in charge of navigation. Jasper knew that Captain Clinton would have it noted to the hour, to the minute. Where they had been then, they were now. The new captain sought this information.

He found it soon enough. Captain Clinton, as always in matters of navigation, even when drunk, has been precise.

They were plumb in the middle of the Paracels.

Oh, sure! Captain Clinton had had a bet on beating the *Fairy* to Canton, as Mr. Lessing had had, as Jasper himself still had. The captain must have had a heap on it—his whole fortune perhaps—to make a course like this.

Jasper worked it out several times, and there was no mistake: Ezra John Clinton had elected to risk everything on a saving of distance, and had taken them right smack into the middle of an expanse of reefs, some of which were under water, waiting to tear the bottom out of any ship, while others were high enough to support colonies of wreckers and pirates. Yes, indeed—Captain Clinton had been quite a gambler.

All around them was death. And there was no wind. *Now* they were safe enough. *Now*, in this calm, nothing could wound them. Jasper almost wished—though it might have been blasphemous—that they could stay like this, not moving, waiting for the end. He knew that when the wind came back only a miracle could take them to safety. Oh, they'd have leadsmen and lookout men—he and Toby Loy, with scowls and guns, would see to that! But more than keen eyes and stout hearts would be needed to take the *Hannah* out of this particular part of the world.

"Jeu-dow! Pilots! Jeu-dow-li!"

Swiftly he glanced at the girl. She had not stirred. He went to the door. He saw Toby Loy running aft, waving his arms.

"Pilots! Pilots!"

"Pirates, eh?" muttered Jasper Green. "All we needed was pirates."

YOU would have said, if you'd been third mate, that it was unbelievable. But if you'd stood there, right there in the bow you'd have seen it.

There were five lorchas and a small junk about four cable-lengths away. They moved toward the *Hannah's* very bow, as though they thought to stoop under the bowsprit and slide right along the keel. To anybody who had not been in the East they would have been fantasies, no more. Hung with strips of gaudy tissue paper of every color under the sun, they moved very slowly, and the water their sweeps disturbed stood out in even smooth rows on a sea elsewhere an opalescent mirror. Straining over the forward rail of each, a spear or cutlass in one hand and a black smouldering stink-bomb in the other, were the men who meant to board. Behind them, mechanical things, automatons, worked the sweeps and watched the lines; and back of each group of fighting-men, a *heang-kun*, a priest, burned gold and silver papers before a likeness of Metsoo-poo, the goddess of the sea.

"Toby! Where did they come from?"

"I come topside, after catchum-up sleepee. Look-see—this!"

Jasper saw the cautious vessels move, saw the lines on the water slither away from the sweeps.

Then he remembered that they were square in the middle of the Paracels. Ezra John Clin-

The Hannah *was square in the middle of the Paracels.*

ton, not anticipating a calm, and willing to risk everything else, had taken them there.

And of course there had been no lookout posted for—how many hours?

Jasper Green suddenly began to giggle.

Toby looked at him sharply.

Jasper Green stopped giggling, and began to grin.

"They're scared, Toby," he whispered. "They're afraid of us."

That was it, too. The pirates did not believe their own good fortune. Toby Loy, catching on, giggled a little himself.

They lay there, flat, giggling, one on each side of the bowsprit, and refused to think of what was going to happen in a few minutes.

Jasper got up first.

"The pivot gun, Toby. The Armstrong."

"Shootee *tissway*?"

"Um. Yes, you're right."

The pirates, no doubt by chance, had picked the best possible way to approach the *Hannah*. How could Jasper and Toby work the pivot gun straight forward without shearing all the *Hannah's* masts and rigging? And in what way could broadside carronades be used against an enemy approaching keel-on? It was absurd.

Jasper waved his arms. He felt that he was getting excited.

"If we swing the—No, we can't, of course! But if we—Toby, all muskets! Captain's cabin! All pistols!"

"Aye, mastah."

"No, wait! I'll go there and get them myself!"

"Aye, mastah."

He awakened her with a shoulder-shove, and he was at the musket-rack even before her eyes had come open. "What?" she asked behind him, her voice fuzzy but unfrightened. "D'ye see these things?" he cried, tossing muskets and pistols on the floor. "Load 'em. Know how?"

She swung her legs over the edge of the bunk.

"No."

"Well, find out then!" he said as he left the cabin.

The sweeps had stopped moving. The sea was all giddy glass again, without ripples. Toby Loy did not turn as Jasper crept next to him.

"There must be a hundred of them," Jasper whispered. He was talking to himself, really. "As soon as they get over being scared—and they're *going* to get over it, Toby—"

"We fightee," the bosun chirped.

"How? You and me against all them? They could ram us and reach the anchor chains before we could do more than pick off a few of them. Then they'd be aboard, and where would we be?"

He was still talking to himself.

He looked back along the *Hannah's* sweet smooth deck. The four carronades were useless here. Any one of them, properly laid, would blow this whole pirate fleet to smithereens; and this was the reason the pirate fleet was inching, inching, inching. The pirate chief, whoever he was, was no fool. Any ship properly armed—and this was certainly an opium clipper, and opium clippers always were well armed and heavily manned—could sink this clump of killers. But such a ship couldn't fire straight-ahead; and no breeze blew. This pirate was not half-witted, whoever he was. His men were scared now, but given a fight, they would know what to do. However, the moment before a fight is a terrible moment.

The men in the junk and in the lorchas were building up courage. They beat gongs vigorously. The priests, kowtowing, hurled paper tributes into the fires below Me-tsoo-poo. And firecrackers splatted everywhere.

"The pivot gun—Toby, could we train that Armstrong forward and leave anything of the ship—*anything at all?*"

This was asking too much of Toby's English, and in any event, the bosun, all the Oriental in him stirred, was fascinated by the pirates' preparations for attack. He stared, making no answer.

The gongs sounded, wham-wham-wham-wham-wham. Firecrackers made a din. Incense rose.

"Let's load the pivot gun anyway," Captain Jasper Green decided. "All the smaller pieces, too. Here's the key. Release a couple of men to carry powder and ball. Here's my pistol. I'll yell for you when they attack."

Then Miss Wallace was next to him, laying out muskets, putting the pistols to one side, obviously afraid of all of them. But they were all there. Four muskets and six pistols. All loaded, somehow.

"Thank you," crisply. "Now go back and lock yourself in. Take one pistol. If they attack—and they almost certainly will—we'll hold them as long as we can. But there's only one thing for you to do, then. You must join your brother."

"Don't you want the cutlasses, too?" she asked quietly.

"Bring a couple of them, please. More would only be in our way."

Watching the junk and the lorchas, he found himself lit by one small flame of hope, but he would not permit himself to linger over it. Instead, he forced himself to consider every possible course of resistance.

CHAPTER V

THE RAINS CAME

TO expect to force them back if they boarded would be silly. He and Toby could fight and die, and that was about all. The Lascars, the dregs of the lot, obviously were useless. Indeed, released, they'd be worse than useless—their panic would hearten the invaders.

It had occurred to Jasper that he might devise a plan whereby he and Toby Loy could run from place to place, concealed by the upswooping bow, and fire a musket here, a pistol there. But the reloading would take so long as to spoil the pretense of numbers, and anyway, the pirates expected at the very least a volley or two—indeed, they probably expected a great deal more than that, which accounted for their present hesitancy. No splattering of musket balls was going to stop these men.

The eighteen-pounders were movable, but he knew that it would be impossible to mount them here in the bow and to cut ports for them. An engineer could not do that, at least not without a lot of time and special materials. The pivot gun, of course, was not movable. It could be made to fire forward, but in that case it would sheer the masts, spraying the air with splinters, bringing down spars and rigging and the masts themselves, quite possibly killing everybody aboard or capsizing the ship, and, in any case, leaving the *Hannah* helpless in the face of what was certainly making up for a bad blow. In time, jury masts could be rigged; but was there time?

An alternative was to get the *Hannah* moved around so that the pirate boats would be within range of her guns. There wasn't a hint of current, there wasn't a breath of breeze. The *Hannah* carried no sweeps, nor would there be time to jerry-rig them, nor men to man them. Andway, if sweeps were put out, the pirates, at present puzzled and vacillating, would, with their light vessels and their own sweeps and superior manpower, swiftly duck under the *Hannah's* bows again. Such tactics could be kept up indefinitely, and from them the pirates would soon learn of the clipper's defenselessness.

He thought of lowering the stern boat loaded with a kedge anchor and some Lascars. The Lascars could be told to drop the anchor several hundred feet away, at right angles to the *Hannah*, and then to return and work a windlass to bring the stern to the anchor, thus moving the whole bark. Even if there was anchorage here, however, that would be a long and laborious business. And indeed it was doubtful that the Lascars, in their present condition, were strong enough to do it. Also, like the use of sweeps, it would show up the *Hannah's* weakness.

"If you'll teach me how, I'll reload for you."

He started, amazed to find her still there. He had been absorbed in watching first the sky, then the behavior of the pirates. The sky was a deeper, darker red than it had yet been, and thunder spoke far away, and lightning began to play easily, gracefully, hinting at terrific powers withheld, as a man might play with a bull whip. The pirates were holding a series of confabs, on all the vessels at once, but especially on the junk, which appeared to serve as a flagship. They would go to the rail, stand with hands on hips, staring at the clipper, shaking their heads; then they would huddle again.

Clearly, some were for an immediate attack, while others counseled caution. The pirates themselves could hardly have been unaware of the sky, of the storm's nearness. Their boats were coasters only, even the junk. They would scurry for cover in a real blow. They were overmanned, for one thing, and probably without supplies, having ventured out only a short distance to see what they could see. It might be that these facts, too, entered into their deliberations.

Jasper never had exposed himself here, nor had Toby Loy, nor did Miss Wallace now, and for this reason the pirates, when their gongs went unanswered, might well have supposed that they'd come upon a derelict. Yet what would a derelict be doing here? There had

been no recent storm. The clipper was not battered in appearance—on the contrary, she was clean and trim, her spars canted at the proper angle, her rigging taut. A terrible scourge, then, which had taken all lives? That was conceivable. But a ship laden with corpses would stink. Besides, some of the cannier pirates must have been pointing out, if the disease was so swift and powerful as to kill off all the members of a clipper crew, then wouldn't it drop anybody else in his tracks? Prize or no prize, no doubt these men were muttering, you can't act against the will of the gods.

So they beat their gongs and set off their firecrackers, and the priests burned more and more gold paper.

The junk edged a little closer.

Toby Loy returned to report in a whisper that all five pieces were loaded and primed. Any serang on an opium clipper, of course, knew how to load and lay cannon. That was as much a part of his work as handling canvas.

The junk edged closer, like a wary animal unsure of its scent. The three in the clipper's bow could hear the chattering of those on the deck, which was crowded, and could hear their grunts of indecision. Soon the boat would be so close that from the rigging these men could reach the *Hannah's* anchor chains, her bowsprit. Suddenly the sweeps stopped. The noise of gongs and cymbals stopped. There were no more firecrackers.

A man hailed them. He was a large bald-headed man, a man with a strong neck, and very brave in a purple cape. He stood high in the bow of the junk. His voice was loud. Perhaps Toby Loy knew what he said? Jasper Green, once he had determined from the man's manner that he was addressing the bark itself rather than any seen person, didn't care.

There was, of course, no answer. Both Miss Wallace and Toby Loy by this time had guessed the game that Jasper was playing.

The man in the purple cape shouted again. He beat his breast. He spat.

Jasper Green passed the bosun a musket. He was sure now that the attack was about to start. He whispered instructions from a corner of his mouth.

But he asked too much of Toby Loy. The bosun's yellow weatherbeaten face went almost white, and there was sweat on the backs of his hands. He shook his head. With his eyes he pleaded with Captain Green not to give him such a command.

"I see," said Jasper. "Well, allee litee. Me shoot alone."

The priest, the *heang-kun,* ranged behind the warrior in purple. The priest was muttering, but he seemed to be listening at the same time. The challenger was listening. Everybody was listening—and there was no sound.

Jasper smeared the tip of a musket barrel with grease from the windlass. Not that there was any sun, but he didn't take chances. He lay on his belly on the deck, and very carefully slid the barrel through the starboard hawsehole, which had all this while been serving him as a peep-hole. He cocked the trigger.

SMOKE rose in a twisting column before the painted statue of Me-tsoo-poo, goddess of the sea. It rose to a height of about four feet, so still was the air. Then it broke into choppy puffs, which wandered past the goddess's face.

That face might have been brass, or it might have been wood or plaster painted to resemble brass. It was hideous, one way or the other; but if it was brass or wood they were lost.

Jasper drew a bead on the face.

The man in the purple cape started to turn away. He started to say something to the priest, who raised his arms.

Jasper fired.

Yes, the face was plaster. It flew all to pieces. Additionally, probably because Miss Wallace had overloaded it, the gun made a terrific noise, the only sound that had come from the silent ship. And after that, as though God Himself wanted to heighten the effect, there was a great burst of thunder and no mere tinkling tryout of lightning, but a massive branch, crackling and spitting across the sky.

The pirates in the junk looked at Me-tsoo-poo, and lost heart. The junk moved back, crowding the lorchas, which had been slipping up like smaller, timid dogs on the outside of the pack. And in a moment, with thunder crashing again and lightning flashing, there was consternation everywhere. Purple-Cape had been answered.

The heavens seemed to be lowered, as though by pulleys. There was a moaning from the northwest, a sound which got closer and closer. All was darkness in that direction, the dark of night, though this was mid-morning. There was a terrific crash of thunder, and once again lightning streaked across the sky, viciously and low.

After that, most of them not even turning to look back at that terrible mysterious haunted ship from which only one terrible sound had come, the pirates, all confusion, hurried away to shelter.

The sweeps went into action, not delicately touching the water as they had a little earlier, but biting it now, splashing it. The leaders shouted. There was no longer a beating of gongs.

So the pirate ships went—and the typhoon came.

A man hailed them from the bow of the junk. A large, bald-headed man, very brave in a purple cape.

MISS WALLACE was lost. These two, Mr. Green and the Chinaman, raced here, raced there, and she herself seemed as much use as a figurehead against which the winds might blow and the rain pour.

How the rain did pour, too, for a little while! And how the wind blew! The rain slap-plapped against everything, in large drops, so hard that for a moment Miss Wallace, not terrified, but by no means at ease, supposed that the vessel had turned over and that nothing but green water sloshed across and across them. Fascinated, Miss Wallace stood motionless, simply not believing it. Indeed, from the beginning it was unbelievable. The boat seemed held in a colossal fist, which squeezed and squeezed it. She had thought of a boat in a storm—she had never known a real storm—as rocking wildly back and forth, charging here and there, a frantic wounded beast. The *Hannah* behaved with dignity and even an easy grace. She rolled, yes, but it was a delicately balanced roll, as though she herself had meas-

ured it, first this side, then the other. It seemed to Miss Wallace that the boat knew just what it was doing, and would arrange the whole thing to suit itself. Miss Wallace wasn't worried. Mr. Green and that Chinaman were, desperately.

She saw them run back and forth, climb among the ropes, tighten things, kick and bawl at the released Lascars, who themselves were terrified. . . She saw the Chinaman scamper to the steering wheel and grab it suddenly, jostling aside a couple of Lascars, as though it meant something, meant a great deal. Mr. Green at that time was far up among the ropes, and he shouted something down to the Chinaman, who couldn't possibly have heard the words, but who nodded his large thick head. And Mr. Green slipped his feet off a rope and let his whole body fall, so that Miss Wallace screamed . . . With his hands Mr. Green caught the rope his feet had been on, and swung a moment, then he let go. It seemed to Miss Wallace that he dropped through the air a long time before landing on the deck, on his feet, with the tiniest of thuds, like a leopard. He saw her.

"Get below, you fool!"

He grabbed her arm, swung her around. She started to resist, and he cried something that sounded like ". . . and a half-witted woman. . ." She would have told him that she meant to help, but he simply picked her up, an arm under her knees, the other arm across the back of her shoulders, and ran with her to the captain's cabin, and threw her inside. It hurt. She had long since stopped screaming, but now she began to weep.

The floor lifted, and swung back and forth. And then, for the first time, she felt panic.

She rushed to the forward door, and it was locked. She rushed to the door that faced the steering wheel, and it was locked. The boat lifted as though it meant to throw her clear to heaven, and the corner of a dresser caught her hip so hard that the pain splintered up to her brain. She fell, and the boat rolled her back and forth. She got up. Her teeth were clenched. She took a cutlass, and, sobbing, began to hack at the forward door, at its lock. After a while she stopped this. For one thing, it was almost impossible to stand still long enough to strike a clean blow, for the vessel was rolling furiously now. For another, she was making no impression upon the door. She dropped the cutlass, and was spun around and hurled into a corner on the floor. She rose to hands and knees, and made the bunk. She crawled into the bunk, sobbing, scared.

It seemed a long time before Mr. Green returned. He was hatless, and his dark brown hair, plastered down by the rain, glittered like mahogany.

"Are you all right?"

He came to the bunk, and she raised her arms entreatingly.

"P-please don't leave me in here, Mr. Green! I won't get in your way! I—I'm so frightened here I'm afraid I'll go out of my mind!"

The door, which he had left ajar, crashed back against the wall. There was a deep-throated roar, and sea water chuckled and leaped over the doorstep and swirled across the cabin. It wish-washed back and forth after that, with the rolling of the ship.

"I came to tell you we're not going to buck it any longer. We're going to run with it. That'll mean putting about, and it might mean that the whole ship will go on her beam-ends. I wanted to warn you."

"But do I have to stay here? Can't I—"

"I guess it'd be all right for you to be outside, if you don't mind getting wet. I'll lash you to the mainmast. Come on."

The first thing she noticed was the roar of the wind. She had never heard so loud and so filling a sound. Next, she noticed that it was no longer raining. She thought for an instant that the ship was sinking, was going straight down with no lurch. Previously the deck had been spear-tipped with raindrops striking so hard that each one was shattered into a dozen bright upspringing specks. Now, instead, the deck was covered with squirming, swirling, hissing water, turning around, slamming against things running in and out of the hawseholes. It was this that had made her suppose that the whole ship was sinking. When she first came out she couldn't even see the deck itself. But presently it rose with a great sucking sound, while the waters threshed around frantically as though fighting to stay there. A moment later and another enormous sea reared, the foam skittering and fairly screaming along its summit, and struck the vessel, sluicing through the ratlines and rigging, thundering upon the deck, which disappeared again.

They staggered and waded from one object to another, his arm around her, and he lashed her to the mast. He pulled the rope tight, apologizing, but she could see the need for firmness.

"Putting about in a sea like this is as dangerous a thing as you can do, I guess," he shouted. "But it'd be suicide to go on. I'll try to get here to release you if we broach to. But I guess I better say right now that you've been wonderful about the whole business."

For all the storm, she smiled into his face.

"Thank you, Mr. Green," she said.

He couldn't have heard her, but he could see the smile. He grinned, and leaned forward and took an ungentlemanly advantage of her. Though she was tied so that she could scarcely move, he kissed her full on the lips. Spray and scud flew past them, stinging their

faces. He took his time. She was still smiling when he backed away.

She stopped smiling when a sea took him, whirled him around, and slammed him against the larboard rail. He almost toppled over. It took him minutes, and seemed to take an hour, for him to fight his way back to the wheel.

Miss Wallace knew nothing about ship technicalities, but as far as she could see they had been throwing themselves right up against each oncoming wave, which thudded and shook the ship from stem to stern, and now they swung slowly around, so as to face the opposite direction.

Mr. Green and the Chinaman were at the wheel, from which they had brushed away Lascars willing enough to be relieved. Nobody else did anything, as far as she could see, except hang on.

It was the worst experience she'd ever had. Tied, straining at her bonds despite her knowledge that they were necessary, she screamed again and again as seas loomed high above the *Hannah,* to hang, hissing, spray whizzing from the top, for a terrible moment before they broke. Each one, she was sure, would be the last.

Several times great sticks of wood, entangled with all sorts of gear, fell to the deck, there to be lifted by the water and to swirl around madly for a little while before finding their way over the side. Three times she was certain that they had heeled over, that the masts were lying on the water or even a little under the surface of the water, that she herself, squirming, praying, was horizontal. Once she thought for a little while that the vessel had turned completely upside down.

She heard no thunder—she could not have heard anything through that wind—and though lightning often flashed, it seemed to flash all around her so that she could not know in which direction the sky was.

She did not know the time of day, whether it was still day, or whether night had come. Even when the lightning flashed she could see very little.

She tried in those brief instants to watch the wheel, where Mr. Green was standing. She tried to fix all her faith on that courageous man, and this effort kept her alive.

Once, in a lightning flash, he waved to her. He was such a glum young man ordinarily, and so serious-minded, that the signal both astonished and cheered her. Mr. Green, though he labored mightily, did not seem to mind the typhoon. He acted positively *gay.* He seemed to be having a good time. She remembered how he had kissed her. Was it that? Then she remembered something else, the cargo, and she glowered. She believed that none of them would get through alive.

CHAPTER VI

BREAKERS AHOY!

WHEN the wind stopped, it stopped with dramatic suddenness, making the ears ring. And though the vessel only joggled back and forth on a series of small, choppy leaping waves, which seemed to be smashing against one another, it *felt* as though it were still flying before the storm, thrusting half its length clear out of the sea as each wave shoved it. For the first time in many hours the sky became visible. It was a lowering dark-red sky, no pleasanter than it had ever been these past thirty-odd hours, but at least it was there, to show which direction was up.

Mr. Green ran to her, leaping over spars, ducking under tangles of rope. He unfastened her, and when she tried to kneel in prayer and found that she had scarcely any control over any part of her body, he slipped an arm across her shoulders and walked her, very slowly, around and around. He shook her a little.

"That's it. Get your circulation back. Then go below and find us something to eat. But hurry! This may last a couple of hours or it may be over in a couple of minutes."

"But—but isn't this the end of the typhoon?"

"I wish it were, but this is just the core, the center. We'll get the same blow again, pretty soon, only it'll be coming from the other direction."

"I'll make tea," she suggested.

"Good."

He was already at work, barking orders to the Lascars to clear the deck, when she tottered toward the companionway.

The return of the typhoon seemed more terrible than its onset. The agony of waiting for it was all but unendurable. After having gone through so much, and after no more than a chance to catch a scant breath, it was cruel that they should have to wait, trapped, helpless, for a second inevitable assault. Miss Wallace shut her eyes when the wind began to rise. It was horrible to listen to. Very soon it ceased to be a sound identifiable as such, and became rather, as it had previously been, a state of affairs, an element of existence, neither good nor bad, to be accepted without a smile but also without a grimace. It got so that she could not remember what life had been like when there was no wind.

It was dark now, definitely after sunset. The air was cold. The spray hurt, again and again raking her face with a many-thonged lash.

The seas came from behind them now, lifting the *Hannah* as easily as they'd have lifted an eggshell, and fairly hurling her forward each time in a great crashing of waters and a

smother of foam. The bark did not roll so much, but she pitched and tossed more than ever. Miss Wallace ceased being uncomfortable and became simply numb. Even when she wriggled her hands or moved her arms and legs, she could no longer feel the rope. As for the water, which coiled around her ankles, sometimes creeping up to her knees or higher, she no longer even thought of that.

Large and small objects had a habit of disappearing suddenly and very violently. They'd work loose, flap back and forth a while, and then, while you looked at them, vanish into the darkness beyond the rail. The handkerchiefs of canvas they had been carrying, two wee white triangular things up at the front of the boat, did this, one after the other. They flapped frantically—and then went, disappearing with no sound. What was even worse, one of the hour hands sent aloft to furl the second tiny sail, after the first had gone, misstepped, or his fingers became numb—and he left the rigging and vanished into the dark, simply was snipped away, his legs and arms outstretched, his eyes enormous, his mouth open, while lightning flashed.

Hours must have passed—days, for all she knew. Surely she couldn't have been conscious all the while? She must have nodded in sleep now and then, or perhaps relaxed in a faint, right there tied to the mainmast, with flying scud in her face, with the sea foaming at her feet.

She did not even know it when Mr. Green unfastened her and shook her and started to walk her toward the steering wheel. That was the first she knew—when she found that he was walking her toward the wheel, where the Chinaman and a Lascar stood motionless. Mr. Green no longer was gay. His manner was grave. Childlike, trusting him, sensing his perturbation, she stopped.

"Is—is there anything the matter?" she asked.

It was a silly way to put it, standing on a deck awash with vengeful water, standing in a South China Sea typhoon in the very middle of the world's most notorious graveyard for ships.

NEVERTHELESS, his manner remained grave. She noticed, too, that the Chinaman, who usually beamed and touched his cap when he saw her, now was as serious of countenance as Mr. Green. As for the Lascars, they were terrified out of their senses.

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One of the hands was whipped from the rigging and vanished into the dark.

They were no more than whimpering, uncomprehending animals, who retained only enough presence of mind to hold onto something.

"Breakers ahead," Mr. Green shouted. "We'll pile up soon."

They could see nothing, nothing at all beyond the rail of the ship, for the darkness was Stygian. But now, straining her ears, she could hear a sound that penetrated the roar of the wind and even strove to compete with it. It was a deeper sound, throatier, less ferocious but as terrible to hear. Yes, it was the boom of breakers, dead ahead and very close. Even Miss Wallace knew that.

"Can't bring her around," Mr. Green shouted. "Just have to keep going and hope we catch the right wave and grind over it."

"Will—is that possible?"

"One chance in a thousand, I guess. Thought you'd want to know."

She pressed close to him, and he kissed her, while the Chinaman stared ahead.

The boom of breakers was much nearer. Mr. Green pushed her aside.

"Hang onto that binnacle. Get both your arms around it. At least it won't take long to get smashed to bits in this sea."

He went to the wheel, and the Chinaman moved over to make room for him.

"Here they come!"

The *Hannah* seemed to be trying to heave herself clear out of the water, to escape the fury of the waves behind her. She lunged wildly forward, bows lifted. Nothing could be seen in the darkness on either side, but Miss Wallace, breathless, sensed high jagged black rocks. Surely there were rocks below. And now the *Hannah* touched these with her keel, and there was a high piercing squeal of timbers. The *Hannah* rose again, like a wounded horse, when another sea hurled itself against the reef. Again she came down, again there was a squeal, but it was far astern this time, right under where they stood. And the bark shivered piteously, and leaned far to the right. Then it gave a crazy lurch, like a playful animal that flirts its tail, miraculously righted itself, and then began to spin slowly around and around.

The wind was as high, the sound of the combers as loud, but the water was different. No longer did great seas slam the *Hannah's* hull and stream over her deck. No longer was the bark lifted, dropped, rolled resistlessly. Now she whirled around and around, and simply shivered a little in the slap of wavelets, while the water at her sides, though they couldn't see it, hissed and spicked and plopped, for all the world like soapsuds.

"Grated clear over and into some sort of lagoon . . ."

She ran to him.

"We're safe! We're safe!"

"Well, we're safe enough right now, if we don't get drove against the other side," said Jasper Green, "but getting out again's likely to be another matter."

He thought of this an hour later, when Miss Wallace was asleep, when the typhoon had twirled off and the dawn had come. He stood amidships, at the rail, and looked out over the lagoon and over the low broken jagged ring of atolls and reefs which surrounded it. Most of the atolls showed no life at all, animal or vegetable, and indeed the whole place was the dreariest conceivable. But on one atoll, which in fact was both the largest and the nearest one, there was a cluster of coral huts. A wreckers' colony, obviously. Nobody but wreckers, or pirates, would live in such a desolate spot. This was sufficiently alarming. Even worse, however, was the sight of the vessels anchored between the *Hannah* and the village.

There were five lorchas and a small junk.

Those who had fled from the bark in superstitious terror had encountered the typhoon on their way back to their island home, but they'd known exactly where they were, as a man knows the location of everything in his bedroom, even though it's dark as pitch there, and with their sweeps and their shallow draught, they had easily cleared the bar to the safety of the lagoon.

Meanwhile, the *Hannah* had darted this way and that, had passed through the core of the twister, had been whirled straight for an island her own helmsmen couldn't see, and had finally fetched up right here at the mercy of the very men who had fled from her.

"Sometimes," muttered Jasper Green, "I think that maybe she's right about the way God feels toward opium."

"No savvy, mastah."

Jasper sighed. "Let the starboard anchor go," he said. "Draw the charges from all the pieces and reload 'em with dry powder."

"Aye, aye, mastah."

IT was a quiet day, and Jasper slept through most of it, and so did Miss Wallace, back in her own cabin. They were disturbed only once, when the watchful Toby Loy, spotting a couple of small boats approaching, touched off one of the eighteen-pounders. The ball landed between the boats with a splash which capsized one and sent the other scurrying for shore. And when Miss Wallace and Jasper Green reached the deck, Toby Loy, who had the four muskets, already had killed two of the four swimmers and was expressing regret that the others were out of range.

Toby knew his enemies. They weren't playing a game. They never expected to give any quarter, and if they received it they took the merciful party to be either a fool or a weakling. War in these waters wasn't a sport-

ing matter played according to a set of rules.

"I think," said Miss Wallace, "we ought to have a talk about that cargo, Mr. Green."

Jasper groaned.

"I haven't changed my thoughts about it," she said sharply.

"I'm sure you haven't!"

All the same, he watched her with the greatest admiration as she walked to the companionway. She certainly was everything a good wife should be, except rich. She was quick-minded, and had an excellent head for figures. True, she tended at times to be tyrannical, but that didn't dismay Jasper, for he didn't believe that any woman could in the long run bulldoze a man who was truly a man. Her panic during the typhoon, her fits of weeping, had greatly strengthened her in Jasper's esteem. They showed that she was human, after all. If only she had money—and didn't happen to be cracked on the subject of opium! He sighed and started for his cabin.

"Oddeh-fella catchum-up samee ting 'e come, mastah?"

"That's right," said Jasper. "Samee ting. Only next time don't let two of them get away."

"Aye, aye, sah."

Late in the afternoon, after the others had come up, Toby Loy turned in for a well-earned sleep. Miss Wallace went to what was left of the galley and did wonders at fixing up a meal for Jasper. She also fed the Lascars, who were released under a watchful eye and cocked gun. They should have spurned food prepared by a Christian, but they fell upon it wolfishly. Afterward Jasper shackled them again.

"Don't you think that you could trust them now, Mr. Green? Don't you think they've learned their lesson?"

"No," he said. "Every man-jack of 'em who thought he could swim it would be over the rail as soon as my back was turned. They all know they'll have their necks stretched in Canton. What do they have to lose? But they might easily win at least tolerance here if they could go to those rascals ashore with the news that there were only two of us to defend half-a-million dollars' worth of Malwa."

She went below. She still needed sleep, she said, and he nodded gravely. He wondered if she would let him kiss her. He wanted to kiss her, but he was afraid. In the blow, somehow, it had been different. There they'd both expected to be killed at any moment. But here the scene was one of peace.

All the same, he reflected as he paced the deck, there wasn't any real peace, only a mirage of it. Those people who lived over on that atoll, and whom you seldom saw moving around—they weren't seeing a ship like this delivered to their front doorstep without reaching down to pick it up! Their inactivity troubled him now as much as his had troubled them before.

It was certain that they weren't wreckers. They had sallied forth in six boats, and they'd approached and prepared to board a brig which they'd had every reason to believe contained at least fifty to sixty armed men. Wreckers didn't behave like that. No, these were pirates—or at least some of them were.

Wreckers are carrion, buzzards. Pirates are birds of prey.

Nor could he expect the spell of Me-tsoo-poo's smashed face to tie their hands much longer. The spell of money was very potent, too.

The night was sometimes clear, sometimes shadowed. The clouds were high but thick, and they moved fast, alternately covering and uncovering the bland silver surface of the moon. There was little breeze. The glass was high. Tomorrow would be a good day.

Jasper went to the Lascars. Grotesquely asprawl, making themselves as comfortable as they could in their irons, they slept. If anything happened, he reckoned, they would awaken like chickens, clucking; and soon they'd yammer and even scream. They should be good watchmen.

He went below. In his own cabin, he stripped to his underpants, the heavy woolen ones Aunt Faith had made for him in Bridgeport three long years ago. He looped two sheath knives to a single belt, and strapped this around his middle. He stepped into a pair of carpet slippers and tied them to his feet.

On deck, he waited for the covering of the moon. Then, moving swiftly, he put two leads and lines, a couple of belaying pins, a coil of light rope, and a bamboo pole, into the sternboat. He lowered the sternboat, and cast it off. It drifted toward the uninhabited atolls to the southwest, as he had known it would do, for he'd studied the currents here. It moved very slowly.

He went forward, and, the moon still being clouded, quietly clambered down the anchor chain and dropped into the water. It was cold.

He swam after the boat.

CHAPTER VII

DEATH'S DELIVERYMAN

ALL this was a lot of trouble, but how could he be sure that somebody on land wasn't studying the brig through a glass, whenever the moon was exposed? There were not many fires ashore, and he heard no gongs, but still he was uneasy.

He remembered the face of that man in the purple cape. It was not a gentle face.

If anybody was watching through a glass, he would see the smallboat drifting away from the stern, turning and turning, without oars, going the way it should go. He would see no-

body in it or near it. He would suppose it to have tugged away its painter.

Jasper swam easily, without splashing.

There were four major openings or possible openings in the ring of reefs. He needed no chart to know where these were. He had already examined them through his own glass and marked their positions in his mind. The first and most likely one, the one over which they'd been pushed by the typhoon, was the southwest one, toward which the boat was drifting. In less than an hour Jasper was there.

He crawled ashore on hands and knees, and lay behind a boulder, shivering. He did not care to move while the moon was out. The boat nudged the shore some forty or fifty feet away.

On the other side of the reef, so near that he wondered why a big comber didn't come clear over now and then, the outer Pacific boomed. In the pass, the water churned and millraced.

After a while the moon was covered, and Jasper ran to the boat.

It was well after midnight, and the moon still battled with clouds, though it was much lower now, when Jasper finished his work at the fourth pass. He had jotted down no figures. He had those in his memory.

There was a fire near the fourth pass, the only fire except on the main atoll. Fishermen, he assumed. He tossed the leads into the lagoon, tied the rope around his waist, and, when the moon shone again, gave the boat a little push which he calculated would take it past a place not far from the fire. Of course it might not be seen, this piece of bait. Or there might be too many fishermen there. Jasper was prepared to swim back to the *Hannah*, in any event.

Moving fast, for he was very cold, he went to the point on the shore where he figured that the boat would touch. He had estimated wrong, but only by a short distance. He found a tall Druidical boulder at the very edge of the shore—there were no trees anywhere in this bleak place, and no shrubbery or even grass—and he stood behind it, a belaying pin in his right fist, a knife in his left.

It was like a petrified forest, this islet on which he found himself. Only shards littered the lumpy earth, only boulders made up the horizon—fantastic shapes, leaning this way and that, black against an all-but-black sky. A wind moaned low among them. The breakers thudded, far away.

When the man came running he seemed as unreal as his surroundings. A real man, a human being, was inconceivable in this moongarden place.

It was, however, a shadow much interested in a drifting rowboat, a rich prize for the miserable islanders. He heard Jasper when Jasper stepped out from behind the boulder, and he turned—but Jasper was upon him by that time.

Jasper didn't have to use the knife. He fetched the man a blow over the ear with the knuckles of the hand that held the belaying pin. He was afraid he might crack the skull if he hit with the pin itself. The man fell like an axed horse, never having made a sound, and Jasper leapt on him and slugged his jaw several times.

The second man was as unreal, for an instant, as the first had been. There was a stirring of shadows, a gasp, and then one of the rocks split—and part of it was the newcomer.

He saw Jasper as soon as Jasper saw him. He drew a knife.

Jasper was edging forward on his carpet slippers, his own knife held close to his hip when the Chinese turned and fled. Sheer fright, perhaps. Or perhaps he sought reinforcements. Or it might be that he thought himself obliged to report promptly the presence of a white man on the isle.

Anyway, he went.

Jasper lost no time. He gave up the idea of swimming back to the bark. He tossed the limp Chinese he'd beaten into the boat, leapt in himself, brought up the oars from the floor, and started away. It was good to row. It warmed him.

He did not even wait to truss up his prisoner. When the poor man groaned and lifted his head a little, Jasper hit him with an oar, and he was silent after that.

There were two shots, two flashes, from the shore. Where the bullets went Jasper didn't know.

The questioning did not take long. The fisherman expected to be tortured, and he talked fast and freely in order to put off the fearful experience. He almost collapsed with relief when Toby Loy told him he could have something to drink and go to bed. They wouldn't even tie him: they'd only lock him in the forecastle.

The bosun had interpreted the running story. He'd had some difficulty with the dialect, a strange one to a Cantonese, but they were both expressive men, given to gestures, which helped.

There was a pirate band from the mainland stopping for water. The pirates weren't many—fifty-five or -six—while there were more than three hundred wreckers and fishermen on the atoll, besides their wives and children. Nevertheless the pirates got what they wanted.

They wanted not only water, it seemed, but about a dozen hands. There wasn't any question of bargaining. The pirates simply picked the strongest men. They were very strong men themselves, and well armed. The junk and

one of the lorchas were theirs, and they intended to take another lorcha—just take it. The expedition of the previous day, involving both of the pirate craft as well as the wreckers' four boats, had been in the nature of a tryout cruise. The pirates had wanted to see which of the lorchas they thought best. They had never expected to come upon an unresisting opium clipper. The reason why the attack had not been pressed promptly was, as Jasper had guessed, because some of the pirates had suspected a trick, while others had feared a deadly infection. Jasper learned, too, that the superstitious fear had been largely that of the wreckers, out more or less en masse because the pirates wished to get an idea of *their* sailing qualities as well as those of their boats.

An additional reason for the hesitancy had lain in the fact that the pirates had not been organized, but distributed among the lorchas and the junk. When he was afraid that the miserable islanders might refuse to work the sweeps so that all the vessels would reach the brig at the same time, or, what would be worse, that they might depart after most of the pirates had boarded, the pirate chief had announced that he would call the clipper's bluff. In his most impressive apparel, in sight of all, he had solemnly and very loudly called upon the *Hannah* to submit to the will of him and his men, and defied her to resist. If she had anything to say for herself, he had shouted, let her say it now. He had shouted this twice. And then Jasper Green had shot the face of Me-tsoo-poo.

The pirates had made for the atoll with the intention of reorganizing and returning to the bark. The typhoon had changed that.

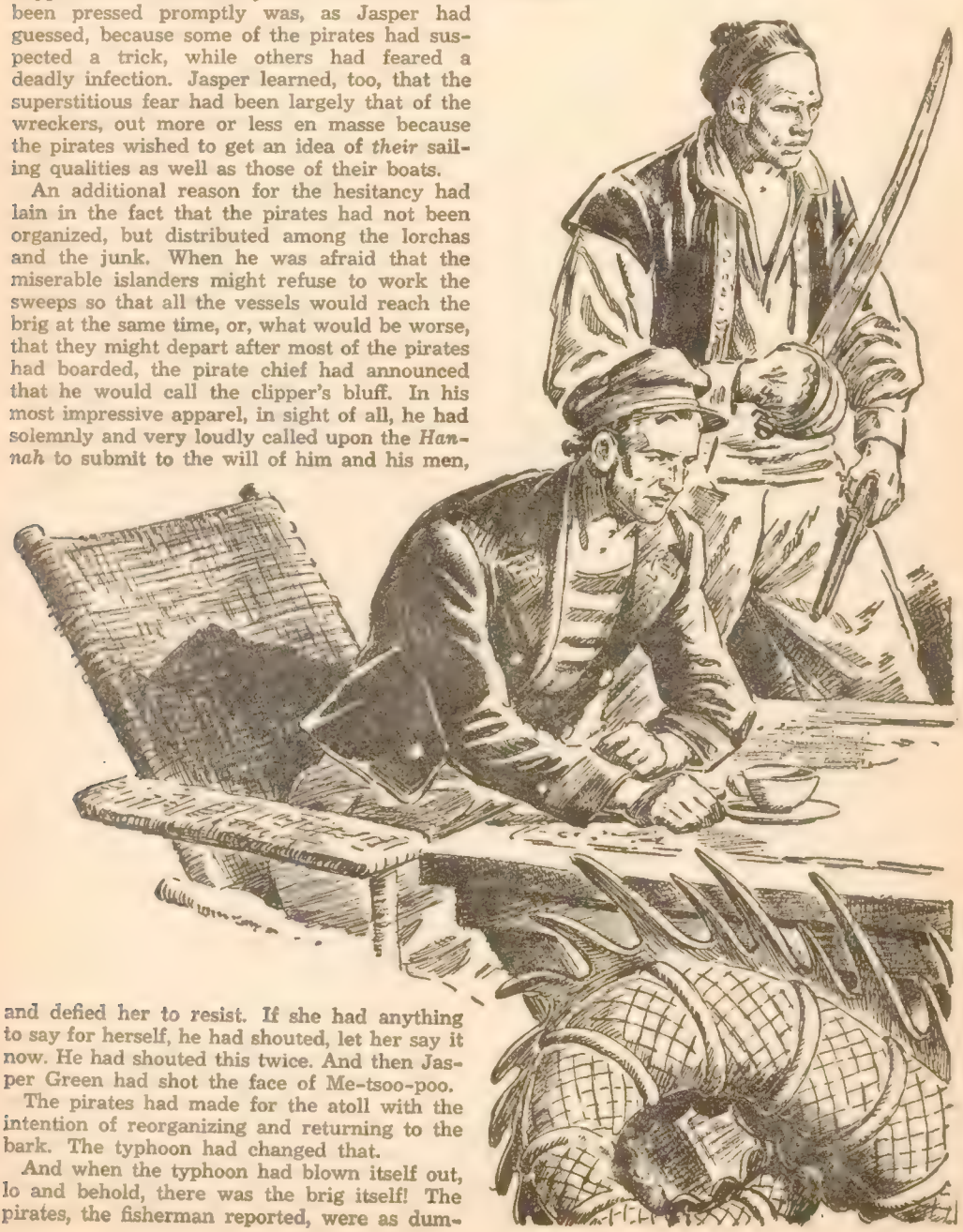
And when the typhoon had blown itself out, lo and behold, there was the brig itself! The pirates, the fisherman reported, were as dumfounded to see the *Hannah* again as those aboard the *Hannah* had been to see the pirate vessels. They were preparing now for an attack. It would take place in the morning.

The pirate chief's name was Shap'ngtzai.

"Knowum, Toby?"

Impressed, the bosun nodded.

"Velly gleat man. Velly gleat fightee-fella. Hi-yah!"



"Well, I guess you and I'd better go have a talk with him," decided Jasper Green.

IT HAD been absurdly easy, and Jasper, his face drawn in an expression of arrogance, his lips purposely curled, marveled at what boldness could do. The man on the other side of the table was bold, too, of course. He gazed with amazed interest at Jasper, who consented to smile wearily.

The pirate chief wore purple, a color he seemed to like. But this time it was a garb of peace, heavy silk, brocaded somewhat irregularly, but gaudily, with gold. His sash was yellow, and it was stuck with all manner of knives and pistols, the hilts of which were gold and silver, carven spinach-green nephrite, chicken-bone jade from Mogaung. The fingering-piece he fondled with unringed but immaculate hands was made of chloromelanite, light violet in color, and was a likeness of K'wan Yin, the goddess of mercy. These were trifles. But the man's head was no trifle.

"Tell him he is welcome, this young officer," the pirate chief told Toby Loy who was acting as interpreter.

It was the biggest head Jasper had ever seen. The mouth was large and very strong, the eyes were tiny. The neck was a mass of knotty muscle—it almost seemed made of marble. The absolute *bareness* of the head was what principally fascinated Jasper. A Chinaman's face was usually hairless, unless the Chinaman was very old, and his pate was bare except for the pigtail. But Shap'ngtzai wore no pigtail, nor did he even wear, like some bald Chinese, a silken imitation of a queue, held on by a silken shameless tassel. No, Shap'ngtzai's head glittered and glowed in the torchlight like mellow old ivory. Only the rings in the ears gave it brightness. The rings were gold, not brass.

"Tell him he is welcome, this young officer, but Shap'ngtzai consents to talk only with the captain of the vessel."

"Tell him I am the captain. He doesn't be-

lieve it? Swear some Chink oath, then. Something strong."

This went on for a long while, Jasper putting his talk to Toby Loy listlessly. Jasper once even managed a yawn.

They caused Toby to swear something by something or other. Whatever it was, it immensely impressed them. After that, the pirate chief looked at Jasper with a new interest, though in fact his tiny dark pig-eyes had held admiration from the start. Jasper nodded, made a polite smile, and sipped tea.

Toby Loy never had a hand far from either his pistol or his cutlass. Jasper, to the contrary, never touched a weapon—for the good reason that he didn't carry any. Jasper figured that you shouldn't try to bluff at all unless you bluffed the whole distance.

"Tell him that I shall crunch his boat like a nut that is crunched in a nutcracker," Shap'ngtzai said.

"Tell him," Jasper directed wearily, "that unless he agrees to my terms I'll blow his whole island off the map—not to mention those cockleshells of his. But say it with politeness, Toby."

It had been so easy! Their very boldness, as Jasper had hoped, had done the trick. The boldness—and their arrogant manner. There had been no violence. Once Toby had drawn a pistol, but Jasper, hands on hips, had smiled deprecatingly, clucking his tongue, and had calmly directed Toby to put the thing away.

There had been some attempt to steer them to an adjutant. This Jasper disdainfully refused to talk about. They would return to the *Hannah* if Shap'ngtzai himself did not receive them. He had even started back toward the beach.

Now Shap'ngtzai looked at him intently, never looking at Toby Loy or at his own interpreter.

"Tell him that he has no men or he would have destroyed us already."

"Tell him," returned Jasper, "that I only lost a single hand in that blow. Tell him that the deck was bare all day only because I had permitted the men to sleep as a reward for their good work. But add," Jasper added, "that I keep lookouts. He saw what happened to those scout boats of his, eh?"

"Tell him that those boats were going to offer him his life for his cargo."

Jasper indicated with a shrug that he couldn't be bothered by such silliness. For the first time he permitted himself to look impatient. He did not lower his dignity to make a verbal reply.

"Tell him that he cannot take his ship out of this lagoon!" There was just a hint of bluff in the pirate's tone, now.

"Tell him that I should like some more tea, please."

THE tea was provided by one of the cutthroats who lurked in the background where the torchlight flickered red. Jasper, after sipping, delicately wiped his mouth. Then he recited the depth and width of each pass. He lied about how much the *Hannah* drew.

However, he had not lied about the soundings at the passes, nor about their location. He knew his tides, too. Shap'ngtzai, though he commanded small vessels, was too good a sailor to come into a place like this without first determining the nature of the exits. He knew that Jasper's figures were correct. For the first time, the little pig-eyes wavered. Jasper smiled.

"Tell him," the pirate said, staring hard, "that perhaps, since he is an Englishman, he would like a little wine?"

"Tell him I'm an American, not an Englishman. Tell him that I thank him kindly, but I don't drink wine."

"Tell him that I regret this. Ask him if he would be desolated if Shap'ngtzai himself drank perhaps a little wine?"

Jasper made something of his next speech. He smiled most graciously. He all but rose from his chair.

"Tell him that I would be given honor if the distinguished Shap'ngtzai were to drink some wine in my poor presence. No, better not say 'poor presence,' Toby. But lay it on thick, anyway."

The pirate chief bowed. Jasper bowed. The pirate chief clapped his hands—and there was wine. Jasper had great difficulty in keeping astonishment from his face when he saw the label. Though he never drank it, he knew something about fine wine. He didn't suppose that there were three dozen bottles like this in the whole of the Far East. Some unfortunate French wallah? Something with a provincial governor aboard, supposedly lost in a typhoon? He sipped his tea. The Chinese drink green tea very hot, in tiny cups without handles. It is polite to drink a lot of it.

"Tell him that I regret that a feeling of tiredness comes over me, or put it something like that anyway."

"Tell him that I believe that he threw all his cannon overside to lighten the ship in the blow. Otherwise he would attack us now."

"Ask him if he thought that was a peashooter that capsized the boat today?"

Jasper wondered sometimes what Toby Loy was saying to the pirate chief. Toby obviously was awed. Jasper didn't care. The manner of the man who spoke was the important thing. He smiled.

"Tell him that if he does not think my men and my guns are in good shape, I could give him a little exhibition. That means 'showum,' Toby."

His eyes tended to swivel toward the bottle. He was truly impressed there. He was impressed elsewhere! Shap'ngtzai's quarters on land, in this miserable place, were regal. The two men talked across a handsome Circassian walnut table inlaid with mother-of-pearl in a dragon design. The teacups were eggshell, and exquisitely painted. The glass from which Shap'ngtzai took his wine was priceless. That French ship again? But some of the English had nice glassware, too. All around them in this hut were heavy-browed fighting men with folded arms and servitors standing at attention. Back of the servitors and the warriors, rich heavy tapestries were hung. If it had been done for Jasper's sake—which was probable—it had been well done. They might have been in a palace.

The rising wind moaned outside.

"Tell him," Shap'ngtzai said in perfect English, "that I would like very much to know what his 'exhibition' is."

It was cleverly timed. It caught Jasper Green unaware, and his chin jerked up. Shap'ngtzai was grinning.

"Why didn't you say before that you spoke English?" said Jasper. "It would have been less amusing, for you, yes. But it would have been more polite."

Shap'ngtzai, after all, was Chinese. Here he was abashed. His guest was drinking his tea—and reproving him. He could not rise and kowtow before his own men, but he did make a friendly gesture with his pudgy hands, and he did drop his eyes.

"I am humbled."

"You are forgiven. After all, it gets our business along. And I *am* tired. See here, you want to know what my exhibition will be?" He leaned over the table, tapping it with a horny forefinger. "At dawn you will hoist a flag—any flag—on any one of your vessels. Ten minutes will be allowed for the men who hoisted it to get away. Ten minutes after *that*, the vessel will be sunk."

They were openly sneering and boasting now. Jasper glanced at his teacup.

"I should suggest using one of the islanders' lorchas. But no doubt you'd do that anyway."

"You are well informed. And your offer, it is interesting."

"Would you like a watch?" Jasper produced his. "So that you may verify my schedule?"

Shap'ngtzai waved this impudence aside.

"I have many watches," said Shap'ngtzai, and drew one and twirled it. Jasper caught his breath, for he had never before seen such an expensive timepiece.

Jasper put his own watch away.

"Since you have heard my promise, perhaps you will consent to do business with me. Because—I'll be honest—it's getting late."

Jasper put his elbows on the table.

"My exact terms, and please listen very carefully, are these—"

CHAPTER VIII

TREASURE OCEAN

THE carronades awoke Miss Wallace at dawn, and she came hurrying half-dressed to the deck. Not only the carronades, but presently the pivot-gun also, which made much more noise. Mr. Green was firing the pivot-gun as fast as he could fire it, with Lascars, sweating heavily, hauling powder and ball. Toby Loy was handling the other four guns, which now were all on the same side, ports having been hacked through the rails for the extra two. Lascars tended Toby Loy, too. The bosun laid each gun, but he made the Lascars load. He went from one to the other, moving very fast, his face scorched, his mouth agrin, pocked with powder, a glowing linstock in his hand.

They were aiming at one vessel only, a vessel with a large yellow flag. Even as Miss Wallace watched, that vessel, one of the meaner lorchas, uptilted crazily, and it started to turn, and then, water leaping from cannonshots all around it, it swiftly sank. There was a huge swirling of water—and then the lorcha simply wasn't there any more.

After that, Jasper went back and forth among the Lascars, yapping orders, as Toby Loy was doing.

The air was crowded with little blue whiffs of gunsmoke, but a breeze, which strengthened each minute, soon took these away. The deck was dotted with little heaps of spilled powder. Unused balls lolled back and forth. One of the Lascars had been hurt, evidently by the recoil of a carronade, and he hopped about, holding an ankle, screeching. A long groove of splinters, each a miniature bayonet, had been torn from the side of one of the jerry-built gunports, and Toby Loy, whose left leg had absorbed a score of them, was picking them out as calmly as though they were nettles. He was shouting orders all the while.

The Chinese that Jasper had captured the night before, scared helf to death at the bombardment, broke open the door of the forecastle and came screaming out and ran up and down—until Jasper put out a foot, causing him to go flat, and growled, "All right, that's enough." The powder magazine amidships was wide open.

"Why *did* you sink that boat?" Miss Wallace's voice was high pitched and strained.

"Ma'am, I have certain responsibilities."

Jasper got the Lascars together, and even kicked the Chinese fisherman into a place at the capstan. He took a bar himself. Toby Loy

Toby Loy handled the guns, aided by the sweating Lascars.

took a bar. They all began to grunt, in unison. They began to sing. After a while the chain clunked in the hawsehole, and the anchor rose. Straining, they chanted different things—the Lascars, the Paracelian fisherman, Toby Loy the Cantonese, and Jasper Green who came from Connecticut—but they understood one another.

When it was finished, Jasper wiped his face. Toby Loy looked at the Lascars and the fisherman. Jasper shook his head.

"Not now. We might need 'em again in a minute."

Wiping his neck with a handkerchief, he went aft. Tiredness—would he *ever* get any real sleep again?—wobbled his steps. Amidships he came upon Miss Wallace, who had seized the linstock which Toby Loy in his haste hadn't bucketed. The thing smouldered orange. She whirled it over her head, so that its fire came alive, spluttering.

"Mr. Green, you sank that boat because of the cargo we carry."

"Yes, ma'am."

"You killed men because of the—"

"I think there were no men on that vessel, ma'am."

"How do you know? You would kill anybody for the sake of that horrid poison! Now you listen to me—"

"Ma'am, I've told you that we have to—"

"You listen to me!" She had forgotten how she had leaned against him when the wind blew. She'd forgotten their quiet walks on the deck. Her eyes flashed. "You know very well you're getting ready to leave!"

"Why, yes. We'll be putting on sail very soon now."

"Mr. Green, I won't go any further with this cargo!"

"Ma'am, let me remind you that I am the captain of this vessel."

"You're the captain because men were killed! And why were they killed? Because of that stuff underneath here!" She stamped. She waved the linstock, and it glowed anew. "Every bit of it must be thrown away!"

She ran to the magazine, and he yelled at her, for spilled powder was everywhere. She kept running. At the very edge of the magazine—a shallow hatch in itself and fully opened now—she paused. When he came toward her she waved the linstock.

"*Stop!*"

Jasper stopped, his face cold, the sweat all over him cold.

"Mr. Green, unless you promise to throw every ounce of this cargo into the sea, right now, I'll drop this thing!"

She meant it. She wasn't hysterical, but she had been brooding too long about her brother. She waved the linstock, which flared bright. If she dropped it, the ship would go.

The cold fairly *hurt* the sweat on Jasper Green. His lungs hurt, too—it was hard to breathe.

"If you'd only—"

"Mr. Green, you are a man of your word, I know that. You give me your promise that every bit of the cargo will be thrown into the sea, right here and now, and I'll never reproach you again. If you don't—I'll let this thing fall."

Oh, yes, she meant it!

Jasper swallowed. He waggled his hands helplessly. He was aware of the men behind him, the men who had been catching their breath since that tussle with the windlass. Without glancing at them, he knew that they were watching this woman, too. They knew what she was saying. Whatever their language, they could see the flaming linstock, they could read Miss Wallace's face.

"You agree, Mr. Green?"

"Certainly not. I'd be a criminal in the eyes of any Admiralty Court. I'd spend years in jail."

"If—if you said that you had to get rid of the cargo to make the boat light enough to go over the reef—" She indicated the men. "*They* wouldn't know, Mr. Green."

"No, but *you* know."

"If it were an emergency—"

"You'd still testify against me. And if you took your oath to tell the truth, so help you God, you *would*. You know that."

Nobody else was in the world but these two. They looked at one another. They were about nine or ten feet apart, but he didn't spring. She still could have dropped the linstock and blown the ship to pieces. But she looked at him, her eyes shining, her lips parted.

"Mr. Green, my father was a solicitor, and I remember this much—that a woman cannot testify against her husband."

"That is true, ma'am."

"Then if we were—"

"But who could do it, ma'am?"

She actually laughed. But she held the sullen smoky linstock.

"You are the captain of a vessel, aren't you, Mr. Green? And this constitutes the high seas, doesn't it?"

"I am. And it does. But a man can't marry himself!"

She smiled.

"A man could try," she whispered. "A man who has done all you have—"

He took a step toward her.

She raised her weapon of fire.

"Your word, Mr. Green? If it's wrong afterward—"

"You have my word, ma'am."

She threw the linstock clear over the larboard rail, and it plopped hissing into the lagoon. Then with her arms opened, she went to Jasper Green, who opened his arms to receive her. Soon afterward he turned, barking captain-like orders.

IT was a curious ceremony, and, obviously, not a legal one. The fisherman and the Lascars didn't know what was going on, and it was by no means certain that Toby Loy did either, though the bosum sensed that it was something important. Jasper read the service with solemnity, asked her the question, asked himself the question, answered himself, joined their hands. "I pronounce us man and wife," he said. He kissed her.

Toby Loy had scampered to the forecastle and returned with firecrackers, and he began to set these off. He cheered. The Lascars and the little lone fisherman smiled wanly.

Jasper held her elbows, looking seriously into her face.

"May I take you to our cabin, Mrs. Green?"

"Your—your promise first, Mr. Green."

Once again Jasper barked orders—and this time Toby Loy gasped. Nevertheless, Toby Loy transmitted the orders.

It was strenuous work, but there was nothing complicated about it. It was merely a matter of opening all the hatches and hauling out all the chests, and of carrying those chests across the deck and throwing them over the rail. The *Hannah*, loose and listless, drifted a bit, but Jasper watched the drift.

Jasper watched the work, too, with an expressionless face. The work took all morning and a good part of the afternoon, though Toby Loy forced the men unconscionably, and helped sometimes, as Jasper helped, carrying the chests, railing them, hearing them splash.

One after another the chests went. They were impressive things, all teak and brass, each elaborately sealed with scarlet wax. On they

came, and on. Even the one Toby Loy and his late friends had violated—and which Jasper had resealed with a note explaining why one ball was missing. Even the chest the missionary's sister had tried to break open. On and on, until the holds were empty.

"I'm proud of you," Mrs. Green said.

Jasper could hardly totter. He licked his lips.

"D'ye suppose we could have something to eat?"

Unmindful of the men around, she slipped an arm through his.

"Will you come and help me, Mr. Green?"

Toby Loy found them slopping around in the galley. He yelled something about the guns being locked in the captain's cabin—which was true, for they'd feared that one of the men might cause trouble.

Mr. and Mrs. Green ran up on the deck.

The five Lascars and the little local fisherman were swimming for shore. Toby Loy explained shrilly that he'd fired the only shot he'd had—from his pistol—and that in his excitement he had missed. But if they got the muskets—

The bridegroom shook his head. There were six men, and by the time these two had got the muskets and the pistols they couldn't possibly pick off all the swimmers. *One*, at least, was sure to get ashore. One was enough to tell the tale.

Jasper sighed. There was always work to be done.

"The mainsail, Toby. You'll have to do it alone. I'll handle the jibs. Mrs. Green will take the wheel."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Mrs. Green.

The *Hannah* moved, after a while, as though startled at finding herself pushed. Two men were scurrying up and down her rigging, two very tired but determined men—and a bride was at her wheel.

She was a sweet sailer, the *Hannah*. She cleared the southwest pass with four inches to spare underneath, just as the lorchas and the small junk, crammed with men who had just learned the truth about the *Hannah's* crew, set out in pursuit.

The lorchas and the junk might have saved themselves the trouble. There was a real wind outside, and the *Hannah* lifted herself, seemed to chortle, and started to go.

Short-handed though she was, she beat the *Fairy* to the anchorage at Macao by fifty-one and a half hours.

THE man who was called Shap'ngtzai never pretended that this was his real name. He wouldn't use his real name, which was too good to be splattered, and not because of the criminal nature of his business, which indeed in his own eyes was hardly criminal at all. No, it was because piracy, after all, is *trade*; and trade, while lucrative pollutes. One must think of one's ancestors. Shap'ngtzai would have used an alias had he been a Hong merchant.

Shap'ngtzai was aware of his unusual appearance, and he heightened it in every way he knew. For instance, he could have grown hair on his head; but he caused that head to be shaved as fast as it produced. Already at the top of his profession, he meant to go higher. He was after the big commerce, not the coasting riffraff. He had settled at Bias Bay, with every mandarin up and down that part of the coast in his pocket—thanks to the money from a certain opium deal.

Another chief might have appeared a fool when it was learned that he had permitted two men to talk him out of a large bark. Shap'ngtzai himself had been dashed when he learned the truth. But he was not dashed for long. After all, he did have the opium. It was, as that young Captain Green had promised, the best opium, securely sealed and waterproofed. Malwa, well sealed, had been known to be dry after being salvaged from vessels three weeks under. Shap'ngtzai had not waited that long. A few hours after he'd abandoned pursuit of the *Hannah*, he'd had the entire island population out diving up the dumped cargo. There wasn't anything wrong with it. It simply needed a little labor to get—and Shap'ngtzai had plenty of labor.

He had smuggled it in here and there along the coast, and his profit was enormous. As that clever young captain had suggested as probable, the typhoon had delayed some opium clippers by sending them back for repairs, sunk one or two others and there had been something like panic in Canton, where the prices in the black stuff leaped erratically enough in ordinary circumstances.

Of course, Shap'ngtzai still had to pay for the stuff. That had been the agreement, and according to his own code he was honest.

He strolled along the waterfront at Macao, the greatest pirate of them all, and nobody dared to jeer at him. As always, he had his own obsequious following of schroffs, body servants, assassins and ordinary adorers. His earrings swung. His head glistened. He wore purple and black, bravely.

Jasper received him with cordiality. Jasper knew that it would do his credit no good among the local merchants to be visited by this man, but his own conscience was clear. And anyway, he liked Shap'ngtzai. He disapproved of his business, but he liked the man.

They bowed to one another, and Jasper clapped his hands and called for tea.

"Shall we talk without interpreters?" Jasper asked, and grinned.

Shap'ngtzai smiled.

"I looked up the *Hannah's* draft. Captain, you had to dump every pound of that cargo anyway, or you never would have gotten back over the reef!"

"That's true."

"Why did you not arrange to load it in my boats, then?"

"Because," said Jasper, "if that was done, your men would have had a look—and you'd have learned that we had practically no crew." He spread his hands. "I do not suggest that you yourself would have taken advantage of that—even though capture of the brig by force of arms had no part in our agreement—but the temptation might have been too great for some of your men. You understand?"

"I see. . . . You were daring, and you won."

"There is another reason. My wife had insisted that I throw the stuff into the sea. It amazes you? But a man will do a lot to keep peace in his home, you know."

Shap'ngtzai had met mad white men before, but never one quite this mad.

"And to think that I could have had the cargo *and* the ship!"

"You would have paid with men."

"I can spare men." Shap'ngtzai looked at Jasper with genuine affection. "Would you like me to pay now, Captain."

Jasper shrugged.

"If it is convenient. I have already written to the various shippers that the silver will be sent—with my own agent's commission taken out, of course."

Now Shap'ngtzai spilled a little tea.

"You mean to say, Captain, that you are going to *pay* those shippers? You're not going to *steal* the money?"

"Yes, I'll pay them," said Jasper Green. "After all, it was their opium, not mine."

Shap'ngtzai finished his tea, held out his cup for more.

"One can be too honest, perhaps, Captain?"

"Not when you're just starting up in business."

SHAP'NGTZAI loved to show off. A long line of coolies brought the silver to Captain Green's godown, and Shap'ngtzai's own pirates, parading with drawn swords, were guards over them. Even the residents of Macao had never seen anything like that.

Case after case it came, the finest bar silver. Captain Green had insisted upon bar silver.

Now Captain Green summoned a pale bespectacled British clerk.

"Have them put somewhere far in the back," he instructed, "where my wife won't see them. We'll get them off tomorrow."

So the coolies filed on, each staggering under a case of silver, bar silver, on and on, a seemingly endless line.

Upstairs, Shap'ngtzai and Captain Jasper Green, merchant, drank tea and talked about things. Jasper supposed that Blake, the clerk, was checking the silver as it came, opening a case now and then, weighing a case now and then. Jasper would have instructed Blake to do nothing of the sort, but he feared to throw the Britisher all askew by such unconventionality, and then Blake wouldn't be any good for days. Jasper himself had never questioned Shap'ngtzai's integrity.

"You go to sea no longer, Captain?" the pirate chief asked.

"No. I think it is too dangerous."

Then, since they knew it was near the end of this deal, Shap'ngtzai graciously presented to Captain Green a selenite fingering-piece of the five bats which symbolize long life, health, wealth, love-of-virtue and a natural death. And Captain Green bestowed upon Shap'ngtzai, with proper speeches, a small carved circular panel of imperial green jadeite, in a design of dragons and clouds. They bowed to one another.

Unexpectedly the pirate said, "You would, it may be, meet the sergeant of my guard, Captain? A most estimable man."

Mildly amazed, Jasper averred that it would be a pleasure to meet the sergeant of the guard.

But when Shap'ngtzai had clapped his hands and summoned that dignitary, Jasper sprang out of his chair.

"*Toby!*"

"Catchum-up good job, mastah. Good work," the Chinese replied, grinning.

"Oh, you know him?" murmured Shap'ngtzai.

"*Know* him? Why, he was the best man at my wedding!"

"He was the interpreter who wasn't needed," said Shap'ngtzai. "But he is useful in other ways, to me. He has found his place."

Later, when the cases had all been stowed away, when Toby Loy had paid off and kicked off the coolies, and when the conscientious Blake had rendered his report, Shap'ngtzai, accepting another cup of tea, asked carelessly if Captain Green would be interested in conducting another deal along these same lines.

Jasper purred for some time about the delight of doing business with a man so learned and so wise, but eventually he refused the offer.

"You see, I'm not handling the black stuff any more."

"Oh?"

"My wife doesn't approve of it," explained Jasper Green. "And my wife, in many ways is a very determined woman."

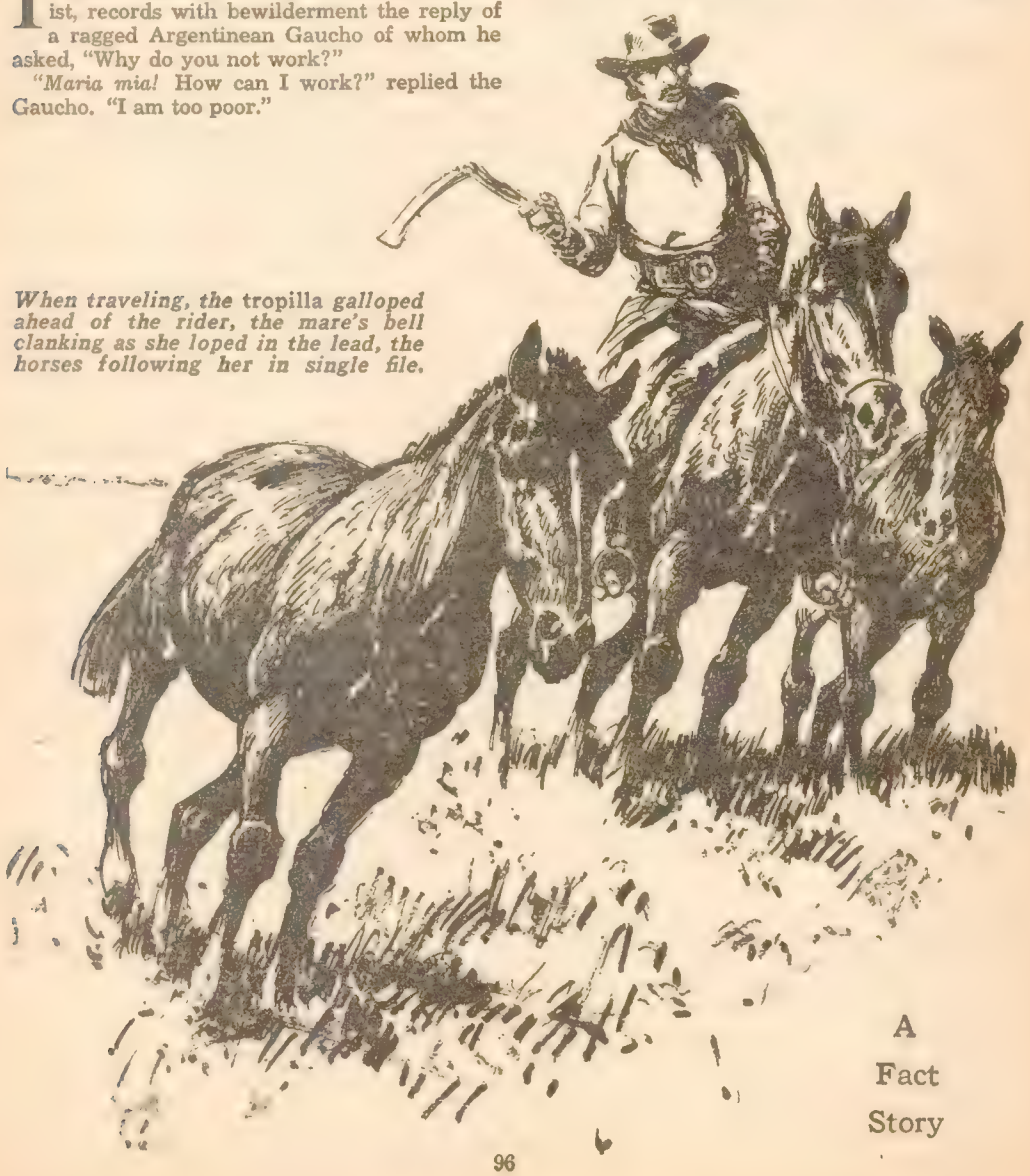
EL GAUCHO

Horseback Men, O Horseback Men!
Brave old bow-legged crew!
Only the strong to your ranks belong,
And history is mostly a horseback song,
Sung to the rhythm of hoofs!
—Badger Clark

IN HIS account of his voyage 'round the world, Charles Darwin, the English naturalist, records with bewilderment the reply of a ragged Argentinean Gaucho of whom he asked, "Why do you not work?"

"*Maria mia!* How can I work?" replied the Gaucho. "I am too poor."

To almost any white man, much less to as industrious a scientist as Darwin, such a reply sounds indeed idiotic. To a Gaucho, or anyone who understands Gaucho temperament, it is a perfectly sensible reply. For what the unfortunate fellow meant was that he had no horses. This lamentable lack left him in the same sort of predicament as, for instance, a plumber who cannot accept a job because he has no tools.



When traveling, the tropilla *galloped ahead of the rider, the mare's bell clanking as she loped in the lead, the horses following her in single file.*

A Fact Story

By JOHN RICHARD YOUNG

Almost everything the Gaucho did he did on horseback. He traveled on a horse with a *tropilla* of from six to a dozen spare mounts, led by a *madrina* or bell-mare, loping ahead of him. His favorite games and sports were played on horseback—at least one of them, *El Pato,* would make even international polo seem tame. He even drew water from a well on horseback, hauling up a huge rawhide bucket by his *lazo* tied to his saddle girth. Drunk after a fiesta or a too-prolonged visit to a *pulpería,* he had no difficulty mounting and keeping his seat though he might be riding only a half-tamed colt. Afoot, he waddled like a bulldog; mounted, no matter his age, he looked young and lithe. Even dead Gauchos have been found still gripping the slack reins while their horse wandered, the rider's sinewy legs, set in death, holding him in the saddle as they had held him in life.

The idea of work such as Darwin had in mind represented the Gaucho's idea of hell on earth. To be left afoot was so great a misery to the Gaucho that at one time the Argentine government sentenced murderers, horse-thieves and other over-ambitious roisterers not to death but to so many years service in the infantry. A Gaucho thus sentenced felt as Godforsaken as a Christian of the Middle Ages chained to a Turkish galley.

The popular conception of a Gaucho is a smooth-faced young gigolo wearing an Andalusian sombrero, a fancy satin shirt with billowy sleeves, a wide belt, leather cuff-protectors, perhaps even a bolero, and bloomer-like *bombachas* tucked into patent-leather boots admirably designed for dancing the tango.

Gently sliding over the facts that the tango originally was not a dance but a sad tale half-sung, half-recited to musical accompaniment, that it originated not on the pampa among Gauchos but in the waterside bars and cafés on the Boca at the mouth of the Rio de la Plata among sailors of all the seven seas, and was couched in slum slang and river jargon much too raw for the ears of polite society, this picture of the Gaucho, except for the belt, bears the unmis-

ILLUSTRATED BY
NICK EGGENHOFER

His feet were encased in soft, toeless botas de potro. *His bare toes gripped the rawhide stirrups lightly and on his heels were long rusty spurs.*

takable stamp, "Made in Hollywood." The real Gaucho was much more picturesque.

A half-savage centaur on a half-wild horse, his contentedly villainous mahogany face knife-scarred, his unkempt Indian-straight hair hanging down his back from beneath a floppy-brimmed plush sombrero tied down against the eternal pampa winds by a tasseled ribbon beneath his bearded chin.

Knotted loosely around his throat, he wore a huge red silk handkerchief, the points hanging down behind; over his shoulders a tawny poncho of guanaco wool.

When he galloped over the pampa after his *tropilla* led by their *madrina* with her clanking neck-bell, the wind, lifting his poncho straight out behind, revealed the long silver-handled sheath-knife at his back, thrust diagonally into his broad belt, the *tirador,* studded perhaps with silver coins.

Besides the *tirador* he wore a red or blue sash, several layers thick, less for display than for added protection against knife-thrusts. Around his waist he carried also his hunting bolas, *avestruceros,* the heavy iron balls or carefully balanced round stones at each end of the eight-foot, braided guanaco-skin cord bound tightly in the cuplike hock-skin of a guanaco, or perhaps in lizard skin.

Two small ostrich-neckskin bags tied to his belt contained sugar and powdered maté, the universal drink of Gaucholand, more stimulating than tea or coffee. From the throat-latch of his horse's bridle dangled a small tin kettle for boiling the water for his daily yerba-maté.

Instead of trousers he wore frilly cotton drawers such as those worn by a lady of the crinoline age; and over them his *chiripá,* a large square of cotton cloth draped like a huge diaper, the ends tucked inside his wide belt so that, when he was afoot, the middle of the *chiripá* between his ankles just cleared the ground.

This garment was as cool as a sarong. In winter or down in cold Patagonia he could make a warm *chiripá* of a woolen blanket. It baffled most gringos who tried wearing it, but in it the Gaucho could leap through lively dances between lighted candles on the ground without needing anyone to stand by with a bucket of water ready to extinguish him.

His feet were encased in soft, toeless *botas de potro,* made of the hide peeled off a mare's hindlegs, the hocks forming the heels. His protruding bare toes gripped his narrow rawhide-loop stirrups lightly, or perhaps he rode without stirrups. On his heels were long rusty iron spurs with large loose rowels that jingled in rhythm to his horse's lope. Looped to his wrist or dangling from a finger, he carried his *rebenque,* the heavy-handled, silver-banded Gaucho riding whip with a wide flat strap as lash.

To the pommel of his high, sheepskin-padded saddle was tied a set of bolas larger and lighter than the balls around his waist. These he used for roping horses, for his hunting balls, thrown hard, could break a horse's leg.

Tied to the cantle of his saddle was his long, braided guanaco-skin *lazo,* coiled neatly on his horse's rump, the loopless end fastened to the off-side of the broad guanaco hide cinch.

This was the typical Gaucho *haragan*—the wandering Gaucho—here today, gone tomorrow, living from year's end to year's end on meat and maté, maté and meat, his only luxuries tobacco and occasionally red wine; dancing the *malambo,* and perhaps knifing a rival, at a fiesta at an estancia on the Rio Salado; a month later winning a horserace at Bahia Blanca, a thousand miles away; hardly less savage than his Indian forebears, yet a *payador,* a maker and singer of wild, sad songs.

WHAT manner of man was this Gaucho? What influences stamped him so uniquely different from all other breeds of men?

For a strange breed he was—a baffling mixture of Indian and Spaniard with some of the best, and the worst, traits of each, and some of his own.

He was a better rider than the Indian or the Spaniard, and a more brutal horseman than either, utterly careless of his mount's welfare; as he was also careless of his own and others' lives.

In an oven-hot Argentine *pulpería* or in a rude *boliche* in bleak Patagonia, he would not touch his first drink without first offering it, with a *caballero's* low bow, to you and to every other man in the place. Only after you had sipped from his cup would he quench his own thirst.

Five minutes later, if you chose to quarrel

with him, he might bury his foot-and-a-half-long *facon* to the hilt in your belly, as callously as he would slit an ox's throat.

He had no interest in politics; he completely lacked the sentiment of patriotism. Yet this horse-riding nomad of the pampa stirred up, fought and won revolutionary wars, bloody victories which cost him the liberty that was the only thing he fought for, wars which doomed him and his class to peonage.

He regarded all rulers, of whatever race, as his enemies, because they would curb his freedom to live his own life in his own way, the thing he cherished most. Yet he produced, made and ousted presidents of nations. All the founders of the Argentine Republic were of the Gaucho class—Rosas, "the Nero of America"; Artigas; Urquiza, "the Tiger of the Llanos," to name a few. But when they tried to dictate to him, the Gaucho turned on them and kicked them out.

History cannot point to his counterpart, probably never will be able to. He was like all nomads, like all horsemen; yet he was different from all other breeds of men.

Arabs, Cossacks, Tartars, Mongols, Indians, Huns, Visigoths—all these turbulent makers and shakers of history lived in groups; tribes or clans. The Gaucho from his beginning was so completely individualistic that each man, with his woman, children and livestock, lived apart, alone in a thatched hut on a treeless plain.

Even the gypsy, whose name has become almost a synonym for wanderer, was not so free as he. Gypsies travel in groups, with wagons. The Gaucho traveled alone, on horseback. He might leave his own family for years, returning as casually as if he had been away for only a few days. He was a rugged individualist to a degree which few people today, least of all his descendants, can appreciate or fully comprehend.

The Gaucho race seems to have begun about fifty years after the Spanish conquest. His mother was a Guaycuru Indian; his sire, the fighting conquistador. But it was the pampa that shaped the Gaucho's way of life and his thinking, the pampa and the countless multitudes of wild horses that overran it.

"Pampa," in the Quichua Indian tongue, means "space." It is a glorified cross between the plains of Iowa and Texas, mostly flat, sometimes gently rolling; an ocean of grass a thousand miles wide from the Atlantic to the foothills of the Andes, and almost twice a thousand miles long, with not even a pebble on the ground for a hundred leagues in some places; a sea of grass domed by a brazen sky—green in spring, scorched yellow in summer, brown in autumn, silvered by hoarfrost on winter mornings, generally the same from end to end, and ruffled ceaselessly by the wind.

South of the Rio Negro, the grass thins out as the pampa merges with the bleak *campo* of Patagonia, a harsh lonely land of semi-barren plains slashed by gorges and canyons called *quebradas*, a land where, in order to survive, a horse or a sheep must graze over ten times as much ground as would be necessary farther north on the sea of grass. But it is still the pampa, treeless and windswept, and it rolls on down to the continent's end.

This was Gaucholand—a vast expanse of sky and plain that gave men a sense of illimitable freedom and a stark feeling of being face to face with the elements.

It was not a land to be traversed by pedestrians; yet until the coming of the Spaniards there were no horses in America.

In 1535, Don Pedro Mendoza, founder of Buenos Aires, brought a small group of horses from Spain. These animals were of the finest Cordoban stock, at that time the best in Europe, with a strong admixture of Arab and Barb blood imported into Andalusia from Barbary. Years later, *los Indios bravos*—the wild Indians—sacked Buenos Aires and massacred the Spaniards. The horses, abandoned, scattered out over the pampa.

Hunted as wild animals by the Indians, stalked by pumas, scorched by sun and hot pampa winds, chilled by the *pampero*—brother to the Texas "norther"—forced by drought to travel enormous distances for water, only the hardiest of these horses survived. Within half a century, they had spread as far south as Patagonia.

It was the Gaucho, not the Indian, who first caught and tamed them.

Gaucho lads began riding almost as soon as they learned to toddle, and no one held their horse or boosted them into the saddle. They learned to clamber up the old *moke's* leg until they could pull themselves aboard.

To the eyes of a foreign horseman, the saddle used by the Gaucho of the pampa is one of the strangest pieces of horse gear ever designed for riding. A rider not used to it feels at first as if he is straddling a wide, flat-bottomed chair. After a few minutes' galloping, this idea gives way to the firm conviction that he is being split up the middle.

Onto the horse's back are put first a couple of loosely woven saddle-cloths or a blanket. Over these the rider lays a thick leather or green-hide *numnah* and on top of this the *bastos*, tightly stuffed, bent leather cylinders about two feet long, laced across the horse's backbone to form a tree. All this rigging is then cinched down with a soft rawhide strap without a buckle.

Over the cinch the rider places a couple of sheepskins and atop them the outer covering of the saddle, the *carpincha*, made of the hide of the capybara, the South American "water-hog." This leather will not sweat a rider as

horse- or cowhide will. The whole saddle is then cinched down tight with a wide strong curcingle.

Because of the thick *bastos* on either side of the horse's spine this saddle presents an almost flat surface. Viewed from front or rear, it is wider than the broadest part of the horse's barrel.

Though the Gaucho always rode "long," with his toes hardly touching the narrow stirrups, his legs were perforce so bent at the knees that he appeared to be riding with leathers as short as an English foxhunter's or steeplechase rider's.

In Bolivia, Uruguay and mountainous parts of northern Argentina, Gauchos used, instead of *bastos*, a light strong wooden frame not unlike the McClelland saddle that did away with this straddling-a-table seat.

No matter which type of *recado* he used, or whether he used any, the Gaucho was always a top-hand rough-rider. The most contemptuous term he could call a man was *maturango*, a poor rider.

He was so supremely scornful of Englishmen's riding that *"mansa como para un Inglés"* —tame enough for an Englishman to ride—was the Gaucho's opinion of a spiritless horse.

GOOD riding alone did not satisfy him; he learned also to fall from a horse as skilfully as an acrobat. Hunting ostrich or guanaco, rounding up cattle or horses, it was nothing unusual for the hard-riding Gaucho to have his horse, running at full speed, fall under him, tail over ears. A Gaucho, even under such circumstances, who came off his mount in any way except on his feet, running, received only a horse-laugh from those who happened to see his disgrace.

This applied with even greater force to a tamer riding a bucker. To be bucked off was bad enough; for a *domador* not to land on his feet proved that he had not mastered his trade.

To the eyes of a foreigner, the saddle used by the Gaucho is one of the strangest pieces of horse gear ever designed.

North American busters and rodeo riders may doubt this, but the Gaucho was trained from boyhood to fall on his feet. When horses were so common that Buenos Aires used horse tallow in its streetlamps and the best horse could be bought for very little money, Gaucho lads were made to race their horses at a *lazo* stretched knee-high above the ground. When the horse nose-dived, the boy vaulted over the pommel feet-first.

Of course, many horses were thus crippled or killed. What was the difference, *amigo?*

There were plenty others to take their place.

So highly did the Gaucho esteem skilled riding that during the war with Spain an army whose leader had been killed in battle chose its new "general" by the following method.

A band of *potros,* untamed broncos, was driven into a corral, over the gate of which was a high crossbar. Those Gauchos who aspired to leadership mounted the crossbar, the gate was flung open and the whole troop of wild *potros* stampeded out of the corral. The man who could drop from the crossbar onto a horse's back and not only stick on the brute but, without saddle or bridle, actually ride it back into the corral—that man should be the new leader.

Perhaps the Gaucho was so reckless of his own life because he was so hard to kill. He had no mere contempt for physical pain; he seemed to be completely indifferent to it. He had the physical stamina of a wild animal. During the Indian wars, a troop of Gauchos voluntarily chased a band of Indians for three days and nights without food or water until they simply wore the Indians out.

There is record of a fight in which a crack Argentine Gaucho named Peralto caught five .38-caliber bullets squarely through his chest before he was close enough to use his knife on the gunman; yet he kept coming on, and slashed and stabbed his enemy fifteen times before he fell dead.

It was this inherent toughness, besides the multitude of horses he had at hand, that made the Gaucho as heartless a horseman as he was superb a rider. He expected his horses to be as tough as he was. If one was not, the nag was "no good." The test of any horseman the world over is not merely, "Can he ride well?" for riding alone is only a branch of horsemanship. The real test is, "Does he understand and treat his horses as well as he rides them?" By this test the Gaucho rates as low as the Apache Indian; far lower than the Tehuelche Indian of Patagonia, also a "savage."

Convincing proof of the Gaucho's rough riding is the fact that when he lacked a large *tropilla* of mounts to choose from, the few animals he rode quickly broke down. To appreciate what this means you must know something of the South American *criollo* horse.

Descended from the Arab-Barb horses that escaped after the sacking of Buenos Aires, the *criollo* horse is one of the toughest animals that ever trod grass. Small like his brother, the North American mustang, stocky, deep-chested, with black hoofs as hard as iron, he averages only fourteen hands tall; an animal that we would call a pony. His long loin and large stride, however, proclaim him a true horse, one that needs a real rider to tame him.

Except for a rather heavy head, different from the coarse head of the domestic horse—Darwin thought it was the result of having to exert more mental effort to survive than the coddled animal of civilization—the *criollo* has all the characteristics of the Arab: lively, intelligent eyes, good shoulders, springy pasterns, silky mane and tail. Another characteristic he shares with the Arab and the Barb is that he has only five lumbar vertebrae. All other breeds of horses have six.

A good *criollo* can carry a heavy rider and saddle for three, even four, days without water. At the end of such a trip, of course, he is "ganted up" like a greyhound; but a few days on good feed and water fills him out again, and he'll be fresh and strong enough to carry his rider seventy or ninety miles at a stretch the next day.

During Argentina's War of Emancipation, these *criollo* horses made marches measured not in hundreds of miles but in hundreds of leagues, journeys that would sound like old-timers' tall tales were they not established historical facts. The horses finished these astounding marches with pep and stamina enough to respond with a flying gallop when their half-savage Gaucho riders charged the Spaniards.

Their only feed was whatever they could rustle—none had ever seen grain—and their only massage they received from the freezing *pampero* or the hot pampa gales that curried them with sand blown like flying shot.

In 1925, to demonstrate the incredible stamina of the *criollo,* A. F. Tschiffely set out with two horses, Mancha and Gato, to ride from Buenos Aires to New York City, a journey of more than 10,000 miles. This ride, lasting two-and-a-half years, is without doubt the greatest long-distance riding feat ever accomplished, and certainly the severest test of all-'round ruggedness any two horses ever successfully endured.

Both *criollos* were bred on the bleak pampa of Patagonia by a Tehuelche Indian chief, Liempichun. When Tschiffely picked them, Mancha was sixteen years old and Gato fifteen. Neither horse had ever worn a shoe, eaten grain or seen a stable. Both had just completed a journey of more than a thousand miles helping drive a herd of cattle from Sarmiento in Patagonia to Ayaucucho in Buenos Aires.

Expert horsemen, even some who knew the *criollo* breed, scoffed at the idea of such a journey across two continents. They insisted that horses bred on the pampa almost at sea level—even Patagonian horses, the hardiest of the hardy—could not survive the 18,000-foot altitude to which they must climb to cross the Andes.

The horses would never even reach the mountains, these experts declared. The desert of Santiago del Estero in northern Argentina would get them first.

Even if by some freak of luck they did get across that burning waste, these experts stated positively, and did surmount the Andes, no

horse bred in wind-whipped Patagonia could possibly survive the vast deserts of Bolivia and Peru; and, anyhow, the sweltering tropic jungles of Colombia, Panama and San Salvador would certainly kill them.

The experts were wrong.

MANCHA and Gato crossed the Argentinean desert almost without working up a sweat. The terrible Peruvian inferno, accurately known as *Matacaballo*, horse-killer, forced them to travel twenty hours at a stretch with hardly one hour's rest, covering as much as ninety miles through deep, loose sand, without water and under a blazing sun that burned even Tschiffely's weathered face until the skin nearly burst; but they got through, and at the finish rolled on the ground like frisky colts.

Traversing the Andes in atmosphere so rare that many travelers bleed from nose and ears and reel giddily with mountain fever, they completely wore out tough mountain mules, ridden by local guides, that tried to keep up with them. Though bred on the rolling pampa, they acquired a nonchalance on precipitous mountain trails, seemingly safe only for goats and llamas, that often made Tschiffely's hair stand on end.

They swam treacherous, icy torrents; then abruptly plunged down into sweltering jungles aswarm with poisonous snakes, insects and vampire bats. Steadily, indomitably, Mancha and Gato went on. Their most dangerous hazard, in Tschiffely's opinion, was United States motor traffic. That really scared him.

On Governor's Island, a few days after reaching New York, Mancha the incorrigible three times bucked off a U. S. Army cavalry sergeant who tried to "exercise" him. Not a bad feat for a nineteen-year-old grass-fed horse that had just completed a journey of more than 10,000 miles of the world's toughest going.

During the whole trip neither of the *criollos* became sick or lame from traveling, neither was greatly bothered by the abrupt and severe changes of climate and weather. According to the man who knew them best, their rider, both horses finished the stupendous trek in even better condition than when they had started out.

Now Mancha and Gato were not super *criollos;* they were just good ones. Quite likely other *criollos* could be found on the pampa, and no doubt among the mustang-bred horses of the Southwestern United States, which could duplicate their feat. But they would be tough horses that could do it, and one need not be a veterinary surgeon to realize that a rider must really work at being abusive to break down such hardy animals.

Yet the Gaucho broke down his horses without even trying to, as a matter of course. Had it not been for the countless horses on the pampa from which he could replace the animals he wore out, he would have been afoot ten months of the year.

The Gaucho trained his horses to run in *tropillas* of from seven to a dozen each. Each *tropilla* was led by a *madrina* or bell-mare, preferably an animal with a bossy or even savage disposition and a thick, strong neck. A *madrina*—in fact, any mare—was never broken to the saddle. Yet she was tame enough to allow a man to walk up and put hobbles on her, or even to come when he called her.

In training a *madrina*, the Gaucho never lassoed his mare, never put a halter on her head or a rope around her neck. He interfered with her neck as little as possible so as to keep her stiff-necked and teach her to resist, not give to, a pull on her neck.

If a colt did not immediately "love" the *madrina* into whose *tropilla* he was put, so that he would follow wherever she led him, he was at first given the same treatment as a new horse which the Gaucho had added to the troop. He was fastened by his halter to the big braided buttons of the mare's wide leather bell-collar, and the strong-necked *madrina* would jerk him along with her as easily as if he were a stubborn dog.

If, when allowed to run free, the colt persisted in trying to leave the *tropilla*, the *domador* would nail him with the bolas; then, without removing the balls, whip him back, stumbling and falling, into the troop. A good *domador* might spend a whole year, if necessary, training a colt to run with his own *tropilla*.

A horse thus trained, if separated from his *madrina*, would beeline hundreds of miles journeying back to where he had seen her last. He would swim rivers, jump fences, detour around any obstacle he could not go over or through, and once past it come back in line. Only death or capture would halt him. If he changed owners, his new owner had to break him in to a new *madrina* all over again. When a *madrina* died, her whole *tropilla* would scatter all over the landscape searching for her, and had to be trained to follow a new mare.

When traveling, the *tropilla* galloped ahead of the rider, the mare's brass bell clanking as she loped in the lead, the horses following her in single file. When the rider wanted to turn off he shouted, *"Yegua!"*—"Mare!"—*madrinas* never had individual names. Glancing back over her shoulder, the mare would swing in the direction the rider turned. If he slowed to a walk or halted, the *madrina* would begin to graze.

When ready to change mounts, the rider called the horse he wanted by name; if it was a colt not yet fully educated, he might dismount and walk up to it or, if necessary, ball it. If a horse called out of the *tropilla* refused to come, the other horses ganged up and kicked him out. They knew whose turn it was to be

ridden and saw that each mate did his full share of work. Indeed, the laziest horses were usually the promptest kickers-out.

Good *domadores* never approached a horse on foot to punish him. It was of the utmost importance for a horse to learn to stand still when approached by a man on foot and to remain standing so long as the bridle-reins were "tied to the ground." For being left afoot on the pampa, where even today estancias of 60,000 acres are still considered quite "small," could be a perilous predicament.

An attack by wild cattle unused to footmen, with no tree to climb or even a bush to hide behind, *might* be met successfully by playing dead until the cattle had sniffed you enough to satisfy their curiosity and then wandered off. But only when they wandered a long distance away on the pampa could you consider yourself safe from their houndlike noses.

Approaching an estancia or a Gaucho's lonely hut on foot, particularly at night, could be a fatal adventure; not because of the man but because of his dogs—huge, savage brutes called *galgos*—resembling a cross between greyhounds or staghounds and mastiffs, bred by Gauchos for hunting and cattle-herding. *Galgos* were trained to pull down and hold mature bulls; a pair of them could overtake and kill a bull guanaco, which can run away from the fleetest horse. Their guarding instinct intensified by the lonely life of the pampa, they would attack even horsemen at night. A man on foot with only his knife to defend himself had almost no chance against a pack of *galgos*.

In the old days a lone Gaucho discovered afoot on the pampa by Indians was worse off than dead the moment they sighted him.

The Gaucho's only weapons were his knife, his *lazo* and his bolas. He almost never owned a gun, or, if he did, seldom had ammunition for it.

The average *facon* was about a foot-and-a-half long, the blade always kept as sharp as a razor-edge. The Gaucho used it for eating, picking his teeth, butchering and skinning, for cutting the long thin hide strips from which he made *lazos* and bola cords, and for fighting. Contrary to general impression, Gauchos were never knife-throwers. But as knife-fighters they were good people to stay clear of.

GAUCHO boys began learning the art of knife-fighting before they shed their milk-teeth. They were trained to kill. Using wooden knives, lads spent hours fighting fierce sham-battles. Often an old Gaucho, squatting on his heels, would thrust and parry with several youngsters at once, letting them see the fine points of knifeplay as displayed by an expert.

As a class, the Argentinos were the most skilful and most courageous knife-fighters, but they could always find title-claimants among the Chilean cowboys, or *huasos*. The Gaucho, for all his natural and acquired ability, and willingness, to battle anything on two or four feet, was usually a friendly, generous-hearted fellow. The typical Chileno, outside Chile, was a quarrelsome, boastful drunk; a self-admitted "hard case" who usually had left his homeland one jump ahead of a police *comisario*. A Gaucho, out of contempt, might show mercy to an antagonist; a Chileno never would. The two did not mix. In fact, Chilenos seldom got along well even among themselves, and when they fought, which was often, somebody invariably died—or turned tail and fled.

Huasos were thorough dandies. They favored stiff-brimmed, blue sombreros, gay woven *chamantos* much shorter than the Gaucho's poncho, fringed sashes, scarlet-lined Valdavian leather hip-boots that could be rolled down to the ankles in hot weather, and silver-inlaid spurs with rowels so large and sharp that when dancing their favorite *cueca* on a wooden floor, they sent splinters flying higher than a tall man's head.

In a *boliche* in Patagonia one time, a drunken young Chileno banged his knife on the bar and challenged any man in the room to fight with him. When no one accepted the challenge and the Chilean continued to shout and strut, an elderly Gaucho stood up and said casually, "Fight me."

The lithe young *huaso* crouched, on guard. The Gaucho advanced, not drawing his knife at all. Only his heavy *rebenque* dangled from one finger. Suddenly, swifter than the spectators could shift their eyes, that whip lashed out and snapped the knife from the Chileno's hand.

Then, calmly, deliberately, the Gaucho backed the young braggart 'round and 'round the room, whipping him until the Chilean collapsed, begging for mercy. The Gaucho finished the painful lesson with the curt advice: "Pull your knife only to eat, until you are man enough to use it otherwise."

A more common way for Gauchos who were skilled with the knife to show their contempt was to strike their opponent *planazo*—a blow with the flat of the blade—proof of how easy it would be to kill such a clumsy pig if one wanted to soil his blade.

In an ordinary brawl, fighters generally slashed at each other's faces. First blood settled most combats. Sometimes, however, the wounded fighter angrily insisted on continuing. If so, his right to risk ending on the ground as a corpse was usually respected.

Another reason for slashing was that the possible prison term was less severe than for a killing done by thrusting with the point. A fatal slash might be accidental; a thrust was never so regarded.

An expert boladero *using a set of small, heavy hunting balls and riding as fast as his horse can sprint, can ball a running target as far away as seventy or eighty yards.*

But a grudge-fight or a blood-feud was the real thing. Gauchos who had blood-feuds on their hands spoke of "the deaths they owed" as casually as they'd speak of butchering a steer. When one fighter said to another as they squared off, "I hate you seven years' worth!"—meaning seven years in prison for intentional killing—his opponent knew that he was in a real carving match which would end only in death.

There were as many strokes and parries as in swordplay, perhaps more. No trick was considered "dirty," because everything went. It was standard practice for each fighter to wrap part of his poncho 'round his left arm as a shield, leaving the other end on the ground to trip his opponent or to flick into his face, momentarily blinding him. But most of the tricks are best left undescribed.

A Gaucho seeking out a fight trailed his poncho from one shoulder to the ground and strutted like a gamecock, or like the Irish lad who boasted in song, "Ne'er a gossoon in the village dared tread on the tail of me coat." It was a smart idea, if you intended to take up his challenge—it was never a bluff—to draw your knife while your foot was still in the air. For the instant you stepped on his poncho he became, as an old Irish *estanciero* remarked, "A cross between a tiger and a jumping-jack."

Las Tres Marias was the affectionate name the Gaucho gave his bolas. The size, weight and material of the balls vary according to the purposes for which a set is made. The lengths of the *sogas*, cords, vary according to the rider's size and the average height of his mounts.

Bolas designed for catching horses are usually made of wood, the balls sometimes as large as turnips. The *manique*, which the thrower holds as he whirls the bolas, is really not a ball, but an egg-shaped sandstone.

Hunting bolas are smaller, heavier, sometimes made of iron. Usually they are stones, rubbed

round and of equal weight, about the size of billiard balls—which, incidentally, make excellent bolas. These can be thrown much farther than horse balls, and when they connect, wrapping themselves tightly around an animal's legs, they frequently break bones.

Avestruceros are two balls on each end of a cord about eight feet long, used mainly for catching ostrich, the common name for the South American rhea. Gauchos and Indians alike used the *avestruceros* also as blackjacks with which to knock the young birds on the heads on the run, a dangerous stunt even for an expert. If the rider, galloping at full speed, missed the ostrich's skull, the ball was almost certain to hit horse or rider.

Guanaco skin is very tough, much tougher than horse- or cowhide. The best skin for bola cords is made from the neck of a guanaco doe, cut spirally in one continuous strip. Bulls' necks are too ridged and scarred from fighting for the skin to be of any use. The strips are then braided with the balls at each end and the *manique* cord braided into the exact middle.

For hunting bolas, puma skin has advantages and disadvantages even guanaco skin lacks. Extremely elastic, the puma-hide cords will tie so tightly around a quarry's legs that it may take the hunter half an hour to work the bolas off. Continued use, however, makes the cords stretch so much that eventually the *manique* cord must be shifted to the new middle. Hence the cords cannot be braided into each other; they must be only tied.

An expert *boladero,* using a set of small, heavy hunting balls and riding as fast as his horse can sprint, can ball a running target as far away as seventy or eighty yards. Unlike the Gauchos, the Tehuelche Indians, experts with the bolas, never balled an animal from directly behind. Instead, they threw from one side almost at a right angle—and rarely missed.

A thrower, holding onto the egg-shaped *manique* stone, whirls the balls above his head like a *lazo,* then swings them vertical with the ground, then horizontally again, judging the distance and the angle he must "lead" his quarry. When the balls, whirling horizontally, are strung out behind his head, he throws the *manique* as if he were pitching an unattached stone. The balls spin through the air spread out, cords taut, and wrap tightly around anything they hit. This art is based almost entirely on riding skill. Standing still, practically anyone can master the bolas almost as easily as learning to throw a ball. But to control the heavy, whirling balls so as to be instantly able to shift your aim when mounted on a speeding horse, that might in a split-second have to turn with the agility of a good cattle cutting-horse, you must be a real rider.

A Gaucho hot in pursuit of a racing ostrich, swinging his bolas at full speed, frequently had his horse fall headlong. The rider, true to boyhood training, usually landed on his feet, then without losing control of the whirling bolas, changed his aim and balled his horse before the excited beast could leave him afoot.

MANY of the mountain and some of the pampa Gauchos were just as expert with the *lazo.* Though they used braided guanaco-hide "ropes" seventy feet long, they were as adept at snaring snakes in thorny thickets as our own "brush-poppers" of Texas, Arizona and New Mexico.

Clad in knee-length rawhide coats called *coletas,* with their lower legs and their wiry ponies' chests protected behind winglike rawhide shields—*guarda montes*—these riders would charge full-tilt into thorn thickets so dense one would think even a snake could hardly squirm through. They rode their cat-footed little *criollos* everywhere, ducking and dodging from side to side to escape treacherous limbs. Like the North American cowhand, they boasted that wherever cattle could run they could follow.

They were probably the world's fastest, and perhaps most accurate, long-distance ropers. When they hit a small savannah, clear of brush, they had to get that *lazo* around the animal before the racing steer, wiry and agile as a cat, could reach the other side. They had no time to waste whirling their loop. Holding three or four coils and the loop in their rope-hand and

Gauchos loved to listen to two payadores *compete in a* payada, *a kind of impromptu singing-rhyming contest.*

as many as eight coils in their other hand so as to get the most distance, they just threw.

Mountain man or pampa rider, almost every Gaucho could strum a guitar; or was so willing to pretend he could that some critical carpers claimed that all a guitarist needed were rope-calloused fingers and a strong wrist. But the Gaucho *payador* really knew how. He was the troubadour of Gaucholand, welcome everywhere.

Gauchos loved to sit around a campfire, sipping their eternal maté, and listen to two *payadores* compete in a *payada*—a kind of impromptu singing-rhyming contest in which each singer tried to outdo the other in improvising stanzas, taking his cue from his opponent's last words. Like the Mexicans, the Gauchos invariably sang of melancholy love affairs. They had no rollicking tunes like *The Chisholm Trail* or the unprintable *Lulu Girl*.

Above all, they loved gambling and horse-racing. At every fiesta and every Sunday at some crossroads town or *pulpería* there were sure to be races; usually sprints of about three hundred yards with only two horses, ridden bareback, matched in each race.

The riders faced their mounts opposite the direction they intended to run. At an agreed signal, they slewed their horses around, jabbed in the spurs. Fourteen starts were allowed and either rider could "call off" a start. The object of this was to fret and tire the other horse by making him run as many false heats as you could, meanwhile conserving your own mount's energy.

Once the race was on, the "dirtier" you could ride, the more admirable a jockey you were. Bumping the other horse, hooking a foot beneath your rival's and spilling him off his mount's back, even cracking him across the nose with your *rebenque*, were accepted racing tricks. Frequently, after a hotly contested race, the riders went to work on each other with their knives.

But to the old-time Gaucho, *El Pato* was the game of games. Played on horseback, without boundaries or time limits, as rough as a combination of polo, hockey, tug-of-war and wrestling, and often ending in multiple knife-fights, *El Pato* was a perfect expression of the Gaucho temperament, the most popular outdoor game of the pampa, the Gaucho's idea of good clean fun.

General Rosas, a man distinguished as a daredevil even among Gauchos, abolished the game because of the high mortality rate and bitter blood-feuds among players. If men insisted on being maimed and killed strenuously, the general wanted them to do it as members of his army. But between his wars and *El Pato*, the army's need of fresh cannon fodder and bayonet bait was being neglected.

When a game was to be played the news was broadcast far and wide. Men came from hundreds of miles on their best horses, often with their whole families along.

A duck, *el pato*, or a turkey or goose, was killed and stuffed into a bag of rawhide. Stitched to the bag were four loop-handles of twisted rawhide, each strong enough to withstand the pulling in different directions by four strong men. The hide bag was then sewn up tight to form a ball about the size of a basketball.

At the appointed time and place, a man carrying the duck rode out to where the other players—any number of them—were waiting. Instantly, the whole horde charged him. He wheeled his horse and fled. The sole idea of each and every player was to get that ball and escape from the other riders.

When a hundred, or even two hundred, expert and utterly reckless riders, mounted on tough, agile *criollos*, set out to accomplish that purpose, *El Pato* was a game worth watching.

Horses, spurred by excited riders, met at full speed in head-on collisions that broke necks and skulls. When four husky Gauchos, each hanging to a handle of the ball, spurred their mounts in different directions, somebody or something had to give. It was of the utmost importance that it should never be the hide or the handles of the ball.

Too often, hot-headed players, dumped violently on their ears or perhaps seeing the best horse they ever owned permanently crippled, pulled their knives and started carving each other on the spot. Few of the other players bothered to break up such fights, or even paused to watch. They were too intent on getting the ball themselves. Often blood-feuds sprang up that involved whole families, sometimes old neighbors of long standing.

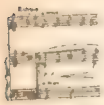
This sort of mounted mayhem might continue for hours while lathered horses heaved and staggered and dropped dead in their tracks. Sometimes darkness ended a game with the players leagues from where they had started. As a rule, however, some one rider, luckier or better mounted than the rest, eventually eluded all the others and galloped off with the bird.

According to custom, it was the victor's right to have the bird—or the pulpy mess left of it—for dinner. Actually, the winner loped to the nearest house with the others trailing after him. A big *asada*, resembling our barbecue, was prepared, the women and children sent for, and those still able to hobble danced all night.

Before dawn there were sure to be several more knife-fights between disgruntled players with scores to settle.

When Rosas, after twenty years of tyranny, was ousted from power, most of the men who had known the fascination of *El Pato* had been killed in the civil wars. Survivors were either too old or crippled for so rough a game or had

had enough bloodshed to last them the rest of their lives. Young men who had never seen the game played did nothing to revive it. Thus died *El Pato,* The Duck.



BUT the Gaucho lives on. Like the American cowboy, he is immortal in the hearts of his people, forever young in song and story. José Hernandez, "the Robert Burns of Argentina," has immortalized him in the best-loved of all South American poems, *The Gaucho, Martin Fierro.*

The hero of the poem—a moody character, true to the Gaucho breed—sings, guitar on knee, the epic story of the last of his race.

"A son am I of the rolling plain,
A Gaucho born and bred.
For me the whole wide world is small,
Believe me my heart can hold it all.
The snake strikes not at my passing foot,
The sun burns not my head."

Being the ideal Gaucho, he remains forever footloose and free:

"I have kept my feet from trap or trick
In the risky trails of love.
I have roamed as free as the singing bird,
And many a heart my song has stirred;
But my couch is the grass-mat of the plain,
My roof the shining stars above."

Stanza after stanza, year after year, Martin Fierro rides the length and breadth of the pampa and mountains, wandering from adventure to adventure, fighting, racing, singing, loving—the complete Gaucho *parejo.* Until at last, old age, swifter than he can ride, has caught up with him; the pampa is fenced; his trail is ended. But Martin Fierro has no regrets.

"For many a day my luck's been out.
Not a roof can I call my own.
I am poorer now than when I commenced.
I haven't a post to rub against
Nor a tree to shelter me. Little I care!
For I can face the world alone."

What Sam Bass and Pecos Bill are to the American cowboys, Gib Morgan to the oilmen, Paul Bunyan to the loggers, Martin Fierro is to the Gauchos. He is the personification of themselves, the embodiment of all their troubles.

Today, all over the South American cow-country there are still lean, mahogany-faced men called Gauchos. But they are not a separate breed; they are respectable citizens of their countries—the banker, the shopkeeper, the clerk.

They still ride the mountains and the pampa after horses and cattle and sheep. But the mountains are owned by financiers; the pampa is cut up by their fences.

A few old-timers still cling to the *chiripá,* but the typical Gaucho today wears trousers like elongated knickers.

Botas de potro, skinned off a mare's hindlegs, are rare, because the hard-headed Yankees, Irishmen, Britons and Scots who manage most of the vast estancias for absentee multimillionaire owners want every peso they can get from the tanneries. Instead, the Gaucho wears rope-soled *alpargatas* that look like bedroom slippers.

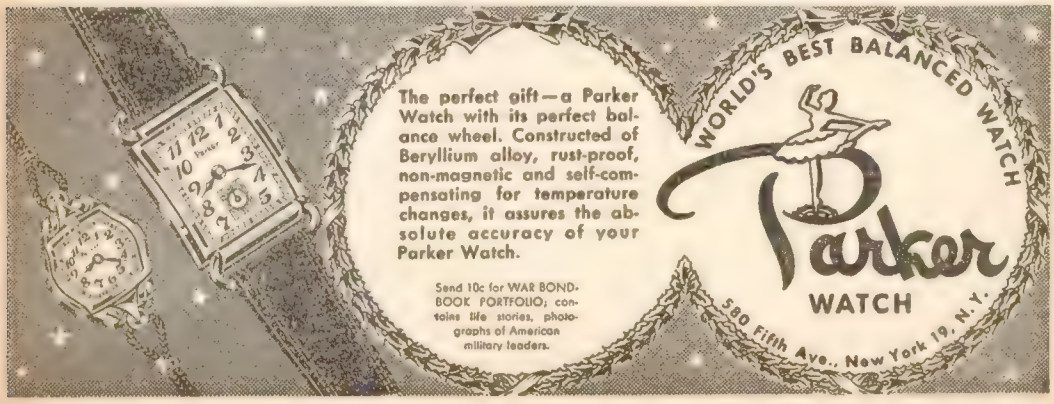
He still rides the same saddles, though with wood or metal stirrups, and he'll still fork anything with hair on and come off, if he must, on his feet. But he works as much on foot now as on horseback, and the *potros* he tames often have thoroughbred sires.

The Gaucho handles these horses much more carefully than his grandfathers handled their mounts, because, you see, the horses are not his. They belong to *el patrón,* the boss.

And if ever you meet him decked out, according to the Hollywood ideal, in a Gene Autryish sombrero and *bombachas* tucked into shiny black—maybe even patent-leather—boots, with silver trappings on his blooded horse, you can bet your life that he is either the owner or manager of a rich estancia, or a hired man rigged up in borrowed gear to entertain his boss's guests at a fiesta.

For he is a wage-earner, a taker of orders.

He is a peon, whose grandfathers fought and died to be free, but who were not interested in politics.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CHAINS FOR COLUMBUS

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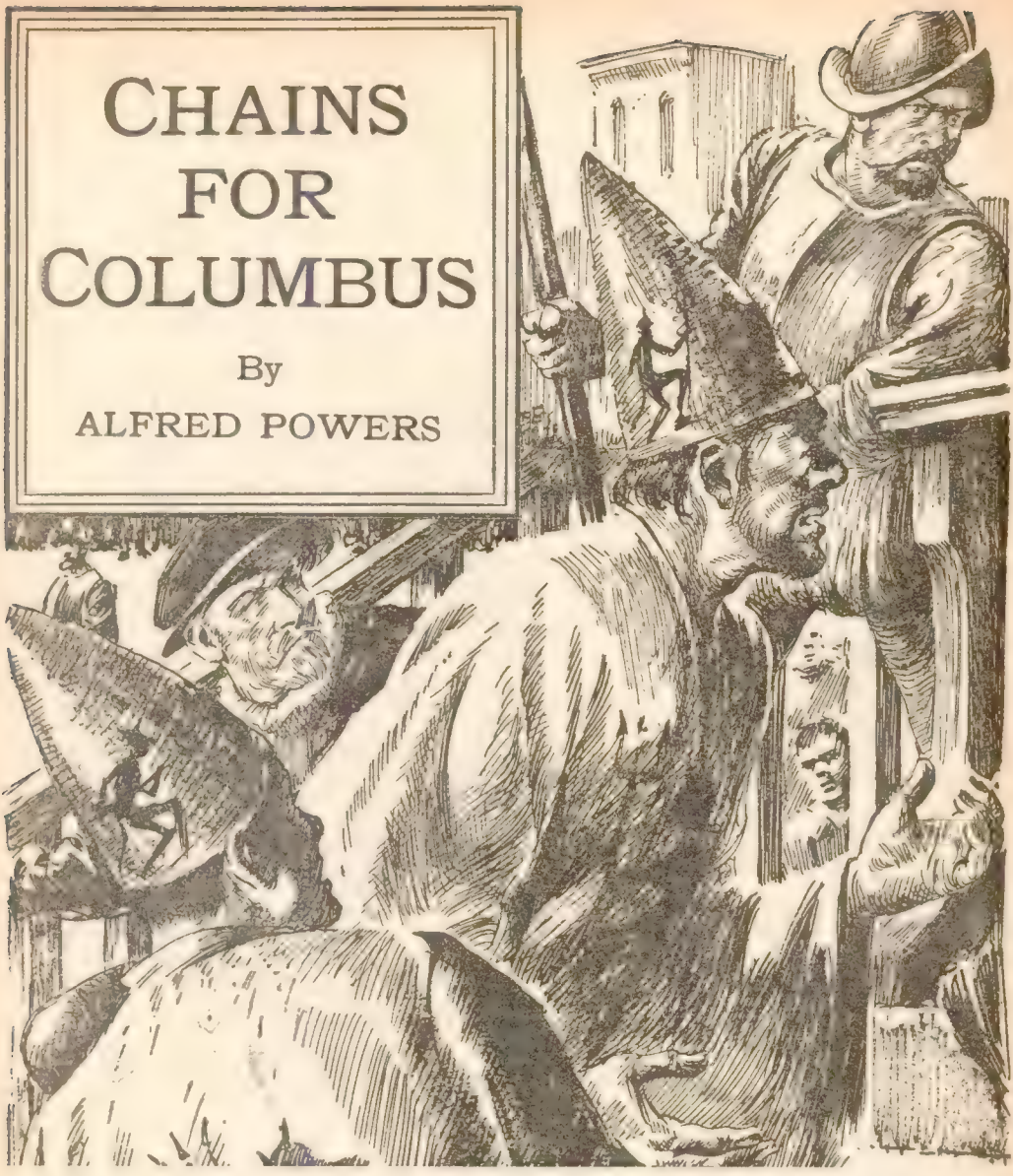


THE STORY THUS FAR:

IN CADIZ, on the morning of November twenty-fifth, in the year 1500, young FRANCISCO PEREZ, the narrator of the story, arrives early at the gunpowder factory of BERNARDO CRUZ where he works. Soon, a young nobleman, HERNAN CORTES, comes in, greatly excited over the imminent return of Columbus from his third voyage, and eager to purchase a keg of powder with which to fire a fourteen-gun salute to the Admiral of the Ocean Sea upon his arrival in the harbor. Francisco goes with Cortes to assist in the firing, and, with the help of Hernan and his four friends—Mendoza, Valdez, Braganza and Gomez—nicknamed "Doza," "G.O.V.," "Portugee" and "Pieces-of-Eight," respectively—gets off thirteen shots before being stopped by FONSECA, powerful government official, jealous of Columbus and close to the king. Then they see a shameful sight—Columbus comes down the gangplank in chains! As he is led away, Hernan slips back and fires the fourteenth shot.

ILLUSTRATED
BY
L. STERNE STEVENS

The inquisitor's face grew pale, his eyes took on a cold stare, the smile on his lips was ghastly, as if frozen there. Then his arms stiffened, his legs stretched out and he slumped down in his seat.

PICO, a sailor off Columbus' ship, approaches the young men, wanting a messenger to take a Bible belonging to Columbus to an address in town. Cortes and Francisco accept the mission, but find that the addressee has moved out of town. Hernan inspects the book and discovers a sealed letter to the queen and a piece of sailcloth on which many gold doubloons have been sewn. Hernan immediately resolves to deliver the message himself. As they walk together, they come upon Pico, who has set up a booth in a dead-end alleyway and is charging passers-by to hear his parrot talk. Hernan and Francisco stay to hear the parrot, which Pico had found in the Indies, where it had come from an unknown country. The bird keeps repeating the cryptic words: *Lord, my lord, my great lord Montezuma.*

Fonseca's agents must have been present, for that official himself appears and demands to know who Montezuma is—is he not a powerful Indies prince to whom Columbus has given fealty above that which he owes to Their Christian Majesties Ferdinand and Isabella? Pico

denies any knowledge of Montezuma. Fonseca then asks peremptorily what he has done with Columbus' Bible, with which he was seen on the wharf. Pico replies that he gave it to a messenger. Hernan jostles a friar standing next to him in the crowd, knocking the friar's Bible to the ground. Hernan picks it up, but effects an exchange, handing him Columbus' Bible with apologies, and slipping to Francisco that belonging to the friar. However, when Francisco is identified as the messenger, Fonseca notices that the Bible is new—published too recently to have been taken by Columbus when he left on his third voyage. Thus, when Francisco and Pico refuse to speak, they are turned over to the Inquisition, while Hernan slips off after the friar, who has gotten a headstart in the crowd.

There is no fate worse than being turned over to the Inquisition, the awful court before which none are innocent. Pico and Francisco are separated immediately. Francisco is first questioned by the inquisitor, then tortured by his minion, Zorilla. Later, during a brief exercise period, when the guard leaves him for a few moments, he locates an old storeroom and sneaks from it a keg of powder. By a trick, he secures from the guard a lighted candle. Threatening to blow the whole building sky-high, he goes to the inquisitor and demands that Pico be brought there and their releases be signed. When Pico sees Francisco in command of the situation, he is overjoyed, and in his exuberance, slams the door. The breeze from its violent shutting comes straight at the candle—and extinguishes it . . .

PART II

AT ONCE the powerful Zorilla had me in his grasp, the now harmless powder keg fell spilling to the floor, and the inquisitor ordered: "Take them back to their dungeons."

We remained in our cells until early the next morning when my door was opened to admit the jailer. "Come with me!" he said.

"To Zorilla?" I asked.

"This will stop the questions," he answered, fastening a gag into my mouth.

I already wore my fetters, promptly put back on me the night before. Since I was not now blindfolded, I surmised my destination was not the torture chamber.

In fact, the jailer led me through the outer door into the broad, unwalled world, and into the rapture of an Andalusian dawn. The fresh air, clean and delicious, entered my nostrils once more.

Waiting for us in front of the Inquisition building was the same carriage that had brought us here only a few days before, but seeming a long while ago. The jailer handed me over to the close-mouthed constable; the talkative one was missing. Pico of Hispaniola, fettered and gagged like myself, was escorted by Zorilla. The torturer was now unmasked and for the first time I saw his odious countenance. He climbed into the carriage to be one of the two taking us wherever we were going.

The cathedral bells and crowing cocks in different parts of the town proclaimed the daylight hour. Few people were yet abroad in the streets. The wheels of the vehicle rattled loudly over the pavement stones. We went along familiar thoroughfares, the horses at a trot. We passed the powder factory, but it was too early for any workmen to be standing outside the door. Everything seemed unchanged. This world from which the Inquisition had suddenly snatched me was awakening to the action of another day, unaware and unaffected.

Pico moved his linked-together hands across his lap in the manner of forming letters in space. Twice he did this before I could make out the meaning—*Ejecución!* I nodded my head yes. Zorilla belatedly saw what was up and slapped him so savagely in the face as to knock his gag out, allowing eight words to escape from his torn lips: "Yes, Francisco, to Seville for execution, but they . . ." At this point Zorilla's hairy hand went over his bleeding mouth and replaced the gag.

Pico at the moment accepted this treatment without resistance, only lifting his hands to wipe off the red wetness from his injured lips with the ends of his sleeves. But about three blocks farther on he crowded me over on the seat until he was somewhat diagonal to the torturer. Then, quickly lifting his bound legs, he planted both feet in Zorilla's stomach, gave a sudden push and shoved him through the door of the vehicle. He fell upon the pavement with a thud and lay there with his cruel, ugly face turned upward, crying out in rage and pain.

The driver, halting the horses, climbed down and helped the limping Zorilla back into the carriage. "*Zape! Chispas!*" he cried in fury and gave Pico a blow on the jaw that started a fresh bleeding. Nothing else happened for two blocks until Pico sat relaxed. Then upon the instant, Zorilla exploded, "*Za*, sailor dog!" and reached out and struck him on the other jaw.

This time the gag was loosened again so Pico had a chance to say: "Zorilla, to save your hairy hide, you'd better pray that I do not escape the Inquisition fires at Seville."

The carriage drew up at a small pier aloof from the regular Cadiz wharfs, as if the black vessel moored there were an outcast among ships, condemned to perpetual quarantine because of its cargoes of human misery. Even its sails were black. There in the morning sun in front of the white city, it was as dark as its own shadow upon the waters of the bay. We were

Quickly lifting his bound legs, Pico planted his feet in Zorilla's stomach and shoved him out of the vehicle.

led across the steep gangplank to the deck.

"Señor Capitán," announced Zorilla, "two prisoners for the Seville Inquisition."

The captain was a small man, but he had a hoarse, booming voice that seemed incapable of a conversational tone. It sounded all the time as if he were shouting commands to a crew at the other end of the ship.

"Put them in the hold," he directed, handing out two keys. "Cell number two for the boy, number seven for the sailor."

I entered my cell first. Pico was led on past, halting to lift and wave his manacled hands in farewell. Zorilla raised his hairy fists to strike again, but thought better of it and dropped them.

The guard, taking the gag out of my mouth but leaving my hands and feet bound, shoved me into a cubicle about five feet square. There was no porthole in this cell in the depths of the ship. Yet it was being ventilated from somewhere. I looked up at the ceiling to find that the air was being let in by a tube, about as big as three fingers, that apparently extended up to the deck. Through this I could see a tiny, bisected circle of blue sky. What caused the heavy line across the circle was a damper-like valve in the tube. I did not know whether this was now open by mistake or whether it was supposed to be open to enable me to breathe more freely on the way to Seville.

The tube carried to me the captain's voice in nearly its full loudness. Some friend came aboard and greeted him: "How is *el capitán* of the Black Ship?"

"El capitán, as always, does not feel good. Black maggots are in my soul, *señor,* from running the prison boat so long. Each year the government pays 40,000 *marevidis.* The Inquisition pays 60,000. But all the time I carry miserable men—to Cadiz to the king's court, to Seville to the court of the Inquisition. I see Spaniards who are joyful for a little while; then I carry them as passengers on this black ship to dungeons or to death. Only a few days ago I took Columbus to Seville; and, *señor,* even the great admiral was heavily shackled. He was not put in a cell; he was allowed to sit on the deck; but his hands and feet were loaded down with chains. He looked at leagues and leagues of ungrateful Spain stretching back from the banks of the Guadalquivir; and he sat there all the way to Seville wrapped in such gloomy thoughts that his sad face has haunted me ever since."

There now came to me the noise of the ship

He was not put in a cell but sat on deck, looking at leagues and leagues of ungrateful Spain.

leaving the pier, and I heard the captain say: "Zorilla, are you still aboard?"

"*Si, Señor Capitán.* I go to Seville where the Inquisition has much work to do. Much work. So they asked for Zorilla."

I coughed twice after the tenseness of my listening.

"The vent!" bellowed the captain. "Is number-two vent closed? Who left it open?"

The vent rattled in shutting. No longer did any sounds reach me except now and then the captain's voice, faint and inarticulate. My cell became very stuffy before the voyage was over, and, of course, it was pitch black.

CHAPTER IV

THE BLACK DEATH

THE vessel stopped at a great pile of stone that rose up from the tawny waters of the Guadalquivir, on the west bank. It was the vast, grim dungeon of Triana, the Inquisition's chief prison in all Spain.

With gags in our mouths again, Pico and I were taken ashore. Above the entrance gate in big letters was this proclamation:

INQUISITION OF SEVILLE
700 HERETICS BURNED
200 DEAD HERETICS CONDEMNED
5,000 ACCUSED, ARRESTED, SENTENCED, PUNISHED

Pico of Hispaniola raised his bound hands and stretched out his two index fingers at the second line—"700 Heretics Burned." I nodded yes.

Zorilla hit him across the wrists and then spoke to the head gatekeeper. "Two prisoners. The stubborn young one is Francisco Perez. The man is Pico of Hispaniola, a Columbus sailor, surly, treacherous with his tricks. I am Zorilla, the Cadiz torturer. They sent for me."

"You are all expected," said the gatekeeper. "Zorilla, you report to the *quemadero,* the burning-place. Cross the river. Go south on Cristobal Colon Street past the bull arena and the Tower of Gold. Turn east on Almirante Loba Street. Then follow San Fernando Street till you come to the Plain of San Sebastian. You will see the burning-place. They want you there."

"I know the way," said Zorilla. "I have helped with the fires before."

He left us. The close-mouthed constable left us. The gate opened. Two of the Seville guards stepped out briskly to lead us in.

We were taken long distances through the narrow, winding corridors, and down to a subterranean level of the somber fortress. Pico's constable halted him, opened a cell door, and pushed him inside. My constable took me on past a dozen more doors and then threw me into a dark cell which already held two men.

The great Castle of Triana, extensive as it was, appeared to be crowded with prisoners—so much so that apparently we could not be lodged in solitary cells here as at Cadiz. Of these two men with whom I was placed, one was gagged and couldn't talk, and the other, without being gagged, maintained a silence no less complete. He paid no attention to us. He sat for hours on the side of his bed looking blankly at the floor.

The next day, as he sat so, black spots appeared upon his face; his stare became fixed and frozen; his limbs grew rigid. Then he toppled over onto the floor, dead. When I started to lift him up, the other man put his bound hands against my chest to prevent me and shook his head no. He himself kept as far away from the prostrate body as he could in the narrow quarters and began pounding on the door.

It was a long time before the jailer arrived. He opened the door and drew back with a frightened cry—"The black death!"

He returned with two constables. "Carry him out," he ordered, "him and his bedding!" But they refused to touch the body. Whereupon he said: "Go wrap yourselves from contamination. Go, but hurry."

They came back with their hands gloved, their arms wrapped around with cloth, and their faces veiled except for eyeholes. They brought ropes and hooks, with which they lifted the dead man onto a litter and threw on top of him his mattress and blankets.

They did nothing to cleanse our quarters, leaving us to breathe in the lingering contagion. So we did not know which would come sooner, the plague or the sentence of the Inquisition, the Lord's wrath or man's, in grim competition for our lives.

On the fifth morning, still unattacked by the pestilence or any symptom of it, we were taken just before sun-up into the trial chamber. Forty-three others were herded there, including Pico of Hispaniola, who lifted his manacled hands to point at four black boxes.

We were lined up against the wall. Pico was beside me. We were all made to put on cone-shaped paper caps and *sanbenitos* that were sacklike smocks as yellow as sulphur.

In a few minutes we left the room and became part of a procession that was formed outside. In the lead were mounted soldiers, followed by a man on foot tolling a bell mournfully. Behind him were thirty prisoners in single file, wearing crosses and half-crosses on their *sanbenitos*. Next went eight porters carrying the four black boxes. Then marched the remaining fifteen prisoners, the ones whose yellow garments were painted with demons. Here they placed Pico and me. Each of us walked between two agents of the Inquisition, who urged us over and over to repent and confess.

"Tell all you know of the Montezuma god," said one in my right ear. "Reveal where can be found the Bible of Columbus," said the other into my left ear.

Pico in line right ahead of me, turned around. He did not walk backwards as Cortes might have done, but stood still in his tracks and pointed his manacled hands at my mouth to call attention to the gag that wouldn't let me utter a word in response to their senseless urgings. The sailor's halt made a gap in the procession, and his two attendants struggled to pivot him about face forward. "Armed guard! Armed guard!" they called. Two soldiers came running up with their spears and put him back in order and prodded him into quick steps to close up the gap.

There began to be dronings about Montezuma and Columbus' Bible from the two men Pico marched between. Without stopping, he lifted his fingers to his locked mouth. One of them now quickly explained: "Before the judge the gag will be removed. Confess everything then."

Behind us came a long section of horses in rich trappings, ridden by nobles, rich men, high officials, dignitaries of every sort. At the head of these was Fonseca. Behind him was the Duke of Alcor, one of the great lords of Seville, on a gray Arabian horse that pranced with life and the pride of life as if the dismal tolling of the bell were only gay music for his eager hoofs.

The procession was completed by more Inquisition officials in pairs; by the green standard of the Inquisition lifted aloft; and, finally, by the two inquisitors themselves—one with a smiling countenance, the other with a face that was sober to sternness. When I saw the two, I wished with all my heart that Pico and I might be sentenced by the stern one.

The melancholy Castle of Triana rose up from the west bank of the Guadalquivir. The flat city of Seville lay mainly on the other side. We crossed over a bridge. Below us was the tawny flood of the river, and masts of ships sticking up thickly along the moorages. Beyond was the high cathedral and the Moorish bell tower that was still higher, ruddied now by the rising sun and sending a great clamor over the town and over the river to announce another *auto da fe* to the populace.

As we crossed Cristobal Colon Street, I saw among those watching us from the sidelines the most evil face that day in Seville. Zorilla stood with his bare, shaggy arms locked across his breast. He was a few yards forward of us when I first caught sight of him. I reached out and touched Pico of Hispaniola in the back; he nodded his head up and down. As we approached, Zorilla said: "Pico, Francisco . . . my guests later today at the *quemadero* . . . a reunion from Cadiz." When we came up even, Pico swerved suddenly to the right, dodging past the man on that side. Before the torturer could unlock his arms, the sailor swung two bound hands against the cruel mouth as it ceased from its tauntings. Zorilla made a vengeful lunge and then controlled himself, not daring to attack a prisoner in the procession.

WE marched to the great public square of Seville. Thousands had gathered there. They filled bleachers that had been built along the four sides, and occupied all the windows and balconies that looked out upon the plaza.

Fonseca was conducted to the place of honor in the bleachers. All the others on horseback remained mounted, spreading out in a kind of half circle, with the great Duke of Alcor in the center.

A square stage in the middle of the plaza contained two rostrums facing each other from the north and south, with a high bench be-

In the lead were mounted soldiers, followed by a man on foot, tolling a bell mournfully. Behind him came the prisoners in single file.

tween. On the west side were several tiers of rough seats for the forty-five prisoners. The fifteen with demons painted on their *sanbenitos* were placed in the top rows. On the east side the four black boxes were put down.

On each rostrum was enthroned an inquisitor. A prosecutor sat on his left, a secretary on his right. Beside each of these chairs stood a constable.

The secretaries called out the names of the relentless team of judges. The sober one with tight-drawn lips was Honorable Señor Andres del Rul. I thought of him as Stern Rul. The one with the curling, sardonic lips was called Honorable Señor Frederico del Salcedo, whom I thought of as Salcedo the Smiler.

One prosecutor called out: "Pablo Trogillano!" The other announced: "Luis Cazalla!"

The four constables went to the front row of seats, took hold of the two trembling men by their arms, removed their gags, and brought them to the bench between the judgment stands. Trogillano faced Salcedo the Smiler. Cazalla faced Stern Rul.

High up in the bleachers occurred an interrupting movement among the spectators. A woman keeled over and lay sprawling on the bench below. She remained there unassisted, untouched. The people close about her stood up and began to leave until an official jumped to his feet and loudly ordered: "None will go. All will stay. Be not alarmed."

"Read the accusation of Pablo Trogillano," said Salcedo the Smiler.

The secretary read: "The prisoner is guilty of using incantations, old woman's cures, meaningless phrases. Shepherds paid him for the right to mumble *Hax, Pax, Max* over their sheep to keep the wolves away."

Sentence was briefly pronounced: "Pablo Trogillano will be publicly reprimanded."

"Please, please, *señor,* do not reprimand me," begged the culprit. "Fine me, do other things, but not this to shame me before all the people."

No sooner did this outburst cease than the censure began—

"I declare to all Seville and to all Spain that Pablo Trogillano is an ignoramus, a dunce, a simpleton, a blockhead. Know you that the tuna fish of Andalusia, though you may examine thousands of them, are without a particle of salt. Yet they have lived in the midst of salt. So with you, stupid *señor,* you live amidst knowledge but none of it sticks to you. Henceforth be known among your friends as Addlepated Trogillano."

As soon as he had finished, the second prisoner was accused and sentenced: "Luis Cazalla, you are exiled from the sea for a period of three years."

"Oh, Señor Judge," he pleaded, "without the surf in my ears I am unhappy. Without the sea I cannot fish."

There was another interruption, this time from among the horsemen. The Duke of Alcor tumbled off his Arabian gray and lay on his back in the dust of the square. "I am stricken," he called out in a hoarse, rattling voice. "It is the plague, *señores.* Will no one assist me? Will no one come?"

Attendants were ordered to lift him up but they refused to touch him, nor would they do so when prodded with lances and threatened with guns. One of the greatest lords of all Spain lay there without succor and shunned. Only the gray horse stood over him and from time to time nuzzled his face.

CHAPTER V

SENTENCE OF THE INQUISITION

THE constables led two more prisoners to the bench between the rostrums.

One secretary read: "Antonio Vertiz is guilty of selling horses to heretics."

"Your house will be torn down," declared the smiling judge, "and the site of it will remain forever accursed."

The other secretary read: "Martin Gallego practices sorcery. He can look down through the dirt into graves and describe the corpses, locate wells and springs, find buried treasure. His sorcerer's eyes are able to penetrate to any depth, as much as forty cubits under the earth, unless it is covered by a blue cloth."

"Martin Gallego," said the stern inquisitor, "I sentence you to four years hard labor in the arsenal at New Carthage."

When the constables stepped forward to get another pair of prisoners, both inquisitors lifted their hands for them to halt, and nodded to the porters of two of the black boxes. The boxes were lifted up and placed on the judgment bench.

A secretary, pointing at one of the sable chests, announced: "The skeleton of Arnaldo Garcia, heretic."

Salcedo the Smiler said: "Arnaldo Garcia, though you are long dead, I condemn you. Your bones, dug up after resting in a grave for forty years, are in the black box. I order them burned. If your name is chiseled upon a tomb, I order it erased. No memory or record of you shall remain upon the face of the earth."

The corpse in the second black coffin was charged with blasphemy and the stern judge sentenced him: "Gasper Martinez, if you were alive you would be here with a bridle in your mouth. But you are dead, and may your lands be accursed, your houses, your cattle. May your wife and children be beggars. Burn his effigy. Burn his bones. Gasper Martinez, four years dead, is accursed."

The two black boxes were removed to the edge of the stage, to be taken later to the *quemadero.*

Zorilla arrived, with two assistants at his heels. He climbed to the platform like one with authority to intrude upon the trial, standing briefly beside the chair of each inquisitor to say something in a low voice. He was darkly garmented from top to toe—black cap, black shirt, black leather apron—and his sleeves were rolled up like a blacksmith's, his hairy arms showing but little lighter than the shirt. He gave the appearance of being active and capable in his sinister business.

Salcedo the Smiler announced: "Since the fires are ready, we will now sentence six heretics."

These were brought down, two by two, from the highest tier of seats. They were put upon the bench, quickly condemned, and led away in an impressive march. In front walked the man with the mournful bell. Second was black-clad Zorilla, with two prisoners behind him in their yellow *sanbenitos.* Next, two porters carried a black coffin, followed by two more prisoners. Then went the second coffin and after it the fifth and six prisoners. At the end, Zorilla's two darkly clothed assistants moved abreast, keeping step like soldiers.

The two judges continued alternately to pronounce judgment as the sun climbed up the clear December sky until it was midday.

The gray Arabian horse of the Duke of Alcor, which all the time had been standing over the now dead noble, sank to his knees, tumbled over on his side, stretched his four legs rigidly out, and lay beside his master.

At this there was more panic than during the other two attacks. "The black death! The

black death!" arose as a dread murmur among the crowd, which was still prevented from dispersing. The awful tribunal of Nature was not allowed to interfere with the inexorable tribunal of the Inquisition.

While the people still exclaimed in terror of the pestilence, the four constables climbed up the steps, took Pico and me, and placed us upon the judgment bench. Pico faced the smiling inquisitor. I faced the stern one, whose forbidding aspect in comparison seemed a kind of boon.

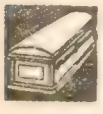
The secretary read out the accusation of the sailor— "Pico of Hispaniola, former voyager with Columbus, is guilty on two counts—first, for concealing Columbus' Bible; second, for trying to introduce into Spain a strange, false god by the name of Montezuma. He has refused to confess."

"I now sentence him," said the smiling judge, with a sudden spasmodic twist in his smile. "Pico of Hispaniola, you shall bur—Pico . . ." The inquisitor's face grew pale, his eyes took on a cold stare, the smile was still upon his lips, but was ghastly, as if frozen there. His arms stiffened, his legs stretched out and he slumped down in his seat. A general comatose, rigid condition possessed him.

The secretary and prosecutor on either side of him jumped from their chairs. They did not go to him to assist him, but moved as far away from him as they could on the platform. A constable huddled off with each of them. Nobody assisted him. Nobody touched him. He lay there stiff and straight in a diagonal position in the chair, still living, staring, not dead, conscious of everything, but helpless.

This terrible court would not be stopped by a doom from heaven falling upon one of its own judges—by death striking him at the moment of his sentencing others to death. Plague spots began to break out. The other inquisitor saw these thicken and blacken upon his associate's face, his wrists, his throat, but he was undeterred.

"Turn and face this way, Pico of Hispaniola," he directed. "I will finish the sentence."



PICO rose up as if to obey. Instead of doing so, he stepped forward to the stricken inquisitor and lifted him up in his chair and looked in his face and inhaled the infection of his breath.

The man was not dead. His eyes were wide open. He could see and hear. He knew what went on, was aware of his condition, realized he was in the throes of the black death—and this wrote terror upon his visage where the plague spots constantly increased. He was sensible of his surroundings but he was powerless to stir. He was clutched all over by a numbing rigor. Decomposition had already set in while he still lived. The odor of the pestilence polluted the air.

"Distinguished *señor,*" said the sailor, "your associates desert you. I alone help you—I Pico, a prisoner, Pico whom you were about to condemn, whose death sentence was upon your lips. It is hard for your tongue to move, the nerves seem paralyzed, but by a supreme effort you can speak, you can say five words—'Pico of Hispaniola is acquitted.' Utter that pardon and I will carry you to your house. You are still my judge. Your decision still has the force of law. Try hard, distinguished *señor.* Speak the five words, and, upon my honor, I will assist you when all others refuse."

He made the effort but only inarticulate sounds resulted. He tried again and a third time and yet a fourth under the urgings of Pico. At last his throat gurgled with the flow of the five broken but understandable words: "Pico . . . of . . . Hispaniola . . . is . . . acquitted."

"Write it down in your book," Pico commanded.

The secretary looked for consent to the other inquisitor, who said: "It is so; it is according to law."

"I am free, then?" asked Pico.

"Yes, free to go. Take him up as you promised and depart."

"Where does he live?"

"He has apartments in the Inquisition castle. Yet no one would receive him now. His infectious body would be rejected at the gates. His regular home is north of the cathedral at Number 83, Street of the Serpents. Carry him there."

Pico now lifted the afflicted man in his arms, but did not move off the platform with him, as everybody expected. He stepped to one end of the trial bench, motioning me to slide clear to the other end, as far as possible from contamination. He supported and propped erect the dying inquisitor so that his rigidly open, staring eyes held the gaze of the living judge.

"Distinguished *señor,*" said Pico, "do you pardon the boy here, Francisco Perez, or shall I carry this body forward to you?"

There was a hesitancy, a pause. As this was prolonged, Pico made a gesture of leaving the bench toward the rostrum. The judge rose in terror, prepared to flee, and began rapidly to talk in big words, putting as good a face as possible on what he was forced to do.

"My wise colleague has dismissed the case of Columbus' sailor. The young *señor* now before me for sentence is held on the same two charges. I therefore follow his sound and worthy authority and declare that Francisco Perez is acquitted."

"Order it recorded and written down," demanded Pico.

The secretary made some entries and replied:

"It is recorded. It is officially and unalterably recorded in the trial book of the Seville Inquisition that Francisco Perez is acquitted."

Pico carried the rigid body of Salcedo the Smiler to one of the black boxes not yet condemned and laid the stricken man upon the top of it lengthwise as on a litter. "We need the box," he announced. "Do you, distinguished *señor*, pardon the dead man's bones or do I throw them out upon the platform?"

"What is his name?" inquired the judge of the secretary. "His crime?"

"Sancho Dala, for heresy, after seventeen years in St. Martin's cemetery."

"Sancho Dala, dead these seventeen years, you are pardoned by the Seville Inquisition and your bones are free to be restored to the tomb."

"Are we all now at liberty to go," inquired Pico, "myself, Francisco, the bones of Sancho Dala, and the distinguished *señor?*"

"You are free. It is so written in the trial books and cannot be changed."

"Francisco," he said to me, "take hold of the handle at the foot of the coffin, but be careful not to touch the body."

We descended from the platform. As we walked away with the doubly loaded box between us, Pico leading and I following, the sober judge who was left, Stern Rul, called out: "Proceed with the tribunal. Who are the next two cases?"

"Alonso Vandala," replied one secretary.

"Ramon Melgar," replied the other.

About halfway to the northwest exit of the plaza, we set down our heavy burden to rest. As we did so, there came to us the inquisitor's voice pronouncing sentence. "Alonso Vandala, heretic, the judgment upon you is that you be reduced to ashes in the flames at the burning-place."

Pico looked down into the wide, rigid, staring eyes of the inquisitor we carried. He was still wholly conscious amidst the poisons of the fatal malady. "Did you hear the sentence of Vandala?" asked the sailor. "He would have been your man to condemn, distinguished *señor*. Your work goes on."

We started out again, but before we had reached the exit of the square, two horsemen galloped past us. "It is Cortes and Pieces-of-Eight!" I cried.

THEY were dressed in cavalier's clothes, but were wrinkled, soiled, and dusty, and their horses were without fine trappings. We set down the box to watch them rein up and come back to us, the two animals being skittish of our strange baggage and having to be spurred to approach us.

"We did not know you at first," said Cortes. "What is this?"

"*Caballero,*" answered Pico, "it is a dying inquisitor, and a dead prisoner's bones."

"You are both free," declared Cortes, waving a paper. "This is a pardon from the queen."

"We are already pardoned. You are half an hour late, *caballero.*"

"We rode with all speed from Granada to get here on time."

"If you had only arrived a half hour ago instead of now," Pico continued in his lament. "We have two pardons and both are bitter jests, *caballero,* for I may fall down in my tracks any minute from having embraced and held in my arms this distinguished *señor* who has the plague. To escape death by burning I chose it by pestilence, and I made the choice not longer than half an hour ago. If we had only waited! Always I am too rash."

Pieces-of-Eight broke in: "We must not keep Fonseca waiting any longer. He has seen us and will be angry."

"Yes, we must hurry to him with the messages," Cortes agreed, but he continued to talk to us. "Columbus is freed from chains; he is summoned to Granada; Their Majesties sent much money to pay his expenses; he wants both of you to accompany him when he goes on the journey at the end of next week."

"We can't," said Pico. "We'll be dead by then."

"You may live," said Cortes in cool encouragement. "At the University of Salamanca we read of two kings in the terrible scourge of 1348 who remained immune by isolating themselves in large apartments and keeping big fires burning day and night. Why not do likewise?"

They rode off toward Fonseca.

"I forgot something," I remarked to Pico. "I meant to ask Cortes if he ever found Columbus' Bible."

"I wish you hadn't forgotten, Francisco. I wish I hadn't. I thought about it for hours in the Cadiz dungeon. I didn't believe the Inquisition would keep on torturing me to find out about the Bible if it had been turned in to them. Yet the one who carried it away unawares must shortly have learned its real identity. What could have become of the book? I was unable to guess any reasonable fate it might have met."

We picked up our sinister burden and started on toward the dying inquisitor's house. As we rested in one of the seven hundred narrow streets of Seville, I exclaimed: "Money, Pico! The Inquisition has all mine."

"And mine," he echoed.

"Then how can we pay for an apartment and for wood to keep a fire burning and for servants to bring us all we need so we can remain isolated? Why didn't we think of our empty pockets when we were talking to Cortes?"

"The household of the inquisitor will no doubt reward us liberally for bringing him."

"Yes, of course."

Most of the Seville inhabitants were attending the *auto da fe*. We met but few people in the thoroughfares; some of these darted to the other side to pass us; some turned back and fled. We realized suddenly that the fear was caused not only by the black box and the rigid, comatose dignitary lying upon its top, but as much or more by the yellow *sanbenitos* and conical caps we still wore to identify us as heretics. We no doubt seemed a sight never before witnessed in Seville—two condemned men going unattended and of their own accord to the *quemadero*, to its stakes and its fires.

We rested four more times before we arrived at Number 83, Street of the Serpents, a fine house in an avenue of fine houses. We ascended a few steps to an entry court, set down the box, and knocked at the door.

This was opened by a man who might have been either a servant or a member of the family. He looked at the inquisitor stretched supine and motionless upon the sable chest like a sculptured lid to a coffin. He looked for several seconds and then cried out, "The black death!" and slammed the door shut. We knocked loudly for some time but there was no response.

Pico carefully examined the face of the plague victim. "I think he is dead now," he said. "We have delivered him as promised. Let us go. Say, Francisco," he asked with abrupt concern, "do I look as pale as he did when he first took sick, are black spots beginning to come out on my face? I don't feel anything yet."

"You look just the same as you always did," I said. "But the fire, Pico. We still don't have any money."

"All we can do is go along the Guadalquivir and pick up driftwood from the bank, and borrow a torchlight, and build a fire in the open."

We began to walk in the direction of the river. As we crossed Cristobal Colon Street, I looked southeast toward the Plain of San Sebastian. "See the smoke," I called out. "It is the *quemadero*. They are burning the first six heretics and the two boxes of bones."

"Let us go there, Francisco, to the brightest and warmest fire in all Seville today—ours without labor and without cost."

"I'm afraid, Pico."

"There's no cause. Our trial's over. We're free. It's written down in the book."

"Pico, don't forget who's at the *quemadero*."

"One reason I want to go."

"His men will grab us. He'll pretend he never heard of our acquittal—and do you have any paper to show it?"

"No, I don't, Francisco. By Hurtado's cat, we didn't make the inquisitor give us one—a kind of receipt for our lives."

"Then we'd better stay away from there."

Pico stood irresolute for a minute at the crossing of Cristobal Colon Street, looking at the smoke that rose up black and thick from the San Sebastian Plain.

Then he said: "Come, Francisco. Over there is, as I said, the brightest, warmest fire in Seville today—just the place to keep off the plague, and no wood to get, nothing to pay."

CHAPTER VI

PURSUIT

ON the Plain of San Sebastian the people stood in close assemblage. Amidst them rose the smoke and leaped the flames from the *quemadero*, a huge square hearth of solid stone elevated a few feet above the ground and looking like the foundation of a house from which the house was gone.

There was a prodigious quantity of wood about, some of it in careless heaps like haycocks, some of it neatly stacked in ricks. Men tossed this fuel constantly into the crematorium, which had already done its main work with the heretics and now completely concealed what it continued to consume, blazing innocently like a public bonfire in some gay fiesta.

At first sight of our yellow garments and conical caps, the outer fringe of the crowd accepted us as coming to add fresh zest and entertainment to the conflagration. Then they noticed we were not brought by guards but evidently came of our own accord, something so singular and unheard of as to be perplexing to them. Quickly a recent arrival recognized us as the pair who had taken the stricken inquisitor away from the plaza. In low tones he informed those about him. And these took it up until it became a murmur of warning ahead of us. "They are infected. By close contact they were exposed to the plague. They carry the contagion of the pestilence. Their touch is fatal." Whereupon they pushed back to the right and left and made a wide pathway for us.

As we drew near we saw the man in charge of the burning—Zorilla.

A few moments later he observed us. "Two more," he called out and started forward to meet us. "Ah, and doubly welcome they are—my two friends from Cadiz! But what is this? Nobody is in charge of them. Nobody brings them. They just come by themselves. I do not understand."

The murmur increased and grew louder. "Give them room, *señores*, as you value your lives. Do not touch them. They are contaminated. They need only to breathe upon you. They need only to brush you with their

garments. They fill the air with the vapors of the black death."

"Señor Zorilla, it is so," confirmed an attendant. "The sailor reeks with the poison. Close in his arms he held Señor Salcedo when the honorable *señor* was dying. His clothes are saturated with the disease. A noxious fever is given off from these garments, from his skin, from his plague spots."

"Have they broken out, Francisco, are the plague spots breaking out?" asked Pico anxiously, with drops of sweat upon his forehead. "I still don't feel anything. But are the spots there now, Francisco?"

"Not a one, Pico. Upon my honor, not a one yet."

He continued to advance upon Zorilla, who began backing away and calling out: "Why do you come here? What do you want?"

The sailor, grim and unsmiling, made no answer but moved forward with slow steps. I trod upon his heels without knowing what his purpose was. Zorilla walked backwards a dozen short paces, then turned face forward and passed round a corner of the masonry. Pico, quickening his steps, followed. I stopped. He went on until pursued and pursuer had circled the *quemadero,* while all the people crowded farther and farther off and watched.

"He has become a madman!" shouted Zorilla to his attendants. "Arouse yourselves! Attack him with your lances! If afraid, use ropes! Lasso him!"

A single attendant of all those there stooped down and took up one of the coils of rope used to wind around and bind victims to the stake. He did no more than fashion the end into a loop when Pico started toward him. He let it fall to the ground. Pico went on to where it was, lifted up an end of it, and pulled the whole length through the palms of his polluted hands.

"Who will pick it up now?" he asked the attendants. "Which one of you will use it as a noose to take me?"

He dropped it. I took him by the arms, fearing indeed that he was sick with the pestilence and was going out of his mind.

"Pico," I urged, "let's just stand here in the heat of the fire. All this exercise and excitement will bring on an attack."

He shook off my grasp. Fascinatedly, fearfully, the people watched his next act. He unfastened the yellow *sanbenito* that reeked with plague germs. Then he removed it, and held it out with both hands toward the torturer.

"Here is a fine garment for you, Señor Zorilla. Will you come and get it or shall I bring it to you and assist you to put it on?"

Instead of stepping forward, as if to suit action to his words, he wadded up the *sanbenito* and tossed it toward the torturer. Falling short of its target by a dozen feet, it unfolded somewhat in its passage and a sleeve landed in the blazing *quemadero.* He hastened to it, rubbed out the fire, and very carefully put it back on, with the one sleeve blackened and uneven.

Then he resumed his pursuit of Zorilla. The latter under ordinary circumstances would have lost all dignity with the crowd, but now in their sympathetic fear they did not seem to look upon him as a craven as yellow as our *sanbenitos.* Both began to travel in a trot. After Zorilla had made a third circumference of the *quemadero,* he darted off at the southwest corner and went through the crowd toward town. Pico still followed, with me coming many yards at the rear and calling out in vain for him to stop.

Their progress quickened to a run, and for block after block they seemed to be about evenly matched. I was the one unable to keep up the speed, and having much ado in the narrow, winding streets not to lose sight of them altogether.

Near the cathedral there came athwart their route, deflecting it, a train of attendants bringing to the *quemadero* the seven other heretics and the remaining black box. Behind these, afoot and on horseback, was a long column of people who had seen us remove Salcedo the Smiler from the plaza and now drew back from the contamination of our nearness.

In the crowd rode Cortes and Pieces-of-Eight. Cortes spurred his horse out of line, overtook and drew up alongside of the running Pico, and tried to dissuade him from further pursuit.

The interruption gave Zorilla increased headway, and he kept going as fast as his legs would carry him toward the Castle of Triana to find sanctuary within the Inquisition walls. He had reached the farther end of the Guadalquivir Bridge before Pico was more than mid-distance across it. Two minutes later the Inquisition gates clanged shut behind him, and within the protection of those gates he stopped and waited for Pico to come up. Just behind the latter, arrived the two horsemen. I joined them tardily and out of breath to hear Zorilla say: "The man has the pestilence. He is mad."

TO the captain of the gatekeepers Pico counted off three demands on his fingers. One was for Zorilla to be handed over to him. He was told to file a complaint with the Inquisition. The second was for his confiscated money to be returned. This the captain promised would be done later if any remained after expenses were deducted. The third was for them to give back his parrot. No such bird had ever passed through the gates as part of confiscated property, the man asserted.

"Bring me my parrot," repeated Pico. "Bring him at once if you haven't killed him."

"But, Pico," I put in, "he would get the plague from you and die like the Duke of Alcor's horse."

"That's right. Cortes, will you or the other *caballero* take care of him?"

"I would be glad to," answered Cortes, "but the gatekeeper tells the truth. Fonseca kept the parrot. He did not give the bird to the Inquisition and did not intend to. Don't you remember, he said he would turn him over to the king and queen."

After fifteen minutes or so, Pico was sufficiently calmed down to discuss matters coolly. "Have plague spots broken out in my face yet?" he asked. "The running could speed up the disease, I suppose."

"Did you ever have a mild case of the plague before," Cortes inquired, "or anything like it?"

"Only the New World fever at the town of Isabella in Hispaniola, the same as Columbus and most of the crew."

"That may give you immunity. It looks like the odds are in your favor. It's a good sign that you haven't felt any symptoms yet. Stay isolated. Build a fire, as I told you to, and keep it burning all the time. If you don't come down with an attack within five days, and if Francisco doesn't, report to Columbus at the Franciscan monastery. He's waiting for you and wants you to go with him to Granada to see the queen."

"Does he want me, too?" I asked. "Does the great admiral really want me?"

"He said to send both of you to him."

"Maybe you can go, Francisco," remarked Pico fatalistically. "You didn't hold the dying *señor* tight in your arms. Pico of Hispaniola will be dead before Columbus starts to Granada."

"You won't die," declared Cortes. "At least you'll have a chance not to, if you quarantine yourselves and bake your bodies day and night before a big blaze."

"But how can we?" demanded Pico. "How can we isolate ourselves and have a fire when the Inquisition has all our money and won't give it back, as you just heard?"

"We'll furnish you with all the money you need," said Pieces-of-Eight. "Also, there is a house at Number 13 Guadalquivir Street that belongs to my father. It's an out-of-the-way place in the north end. The old woman living there will supply you with a room and wood and food. Here is money to pay her."

He asked Cortes if he wanted to go to the *quemadero* and Cortes said he had little stomach for such entertainment. So they rode in advance of us back across the bridge, then along the river to a short east-and-west street. Before we came to the house numbered thirteen, Pieces-of-Eight suggested that we take off the *sanbenitos* and conical caps, folding up the latter in the former, and carying both tightly under our arms to be burned in our fire. This was to avoid a long explanation to the old woman that we were not really heretics. She was to know, of course, that we had been exposed to the plague.

Immediately upon being located in the room, we started a big fire. Upon this we threw the two *sanbenitos* and two caps. Then we opened a window upon the quiet, drowsy street, partly to let out the fumes of burning cloth but especially to talk to the two young hidalgos sitting on their horses several yards off.

"Did you find Columbus' Bible?" I inquired of Cortes.

He turned to his companion: "Pieces-of-Eight, shall I tell them the whole story?"

"Yes, Cortes, everything so they will know we weren't mean enough to desert them in trouble."

"Did the Inquisition ever get hold of the book?" I asked.

"Did it?" added Pico. "By Hurtado's cat, I've spent hours wondering what became of the Bible."

CHAPTER VII

THE BIBLE'S FATE

This is the account that Cortes gave as he sat there in his saddle in Guadalquivir Street talking through the open window to Pico and me:

AS soon as Fonseca's soldiers let me leave, I hurried off, but the priest was already out of sight—unwittingly carrying Columbus' Bible under his arm. He had entered the cathedral by the time I arrived there; at least I assumed this was the place into which he had disappeared.

I had paid no particular attention to his face, the lineaments of which were not strongly enough impressed upon my memory so that I could recognize it again. I knew only that he was a Franciscan friar, from the simple habit of that order which Columbus liked so well because of the kindness, as immortal as it was blessed, shown to him and his hungry little boy at La Rabida Monastery.

All the priests, punctually hearkening to the same noon-day summons, had gone inside the cathedral. A number of people were entering and a few were leaving, but no man in black robes was anywhere to be seen.

Just what hours they would finish their duties and come out, I had no way of knowing. I did not consider it safe to let the entrance go unwatched even for a brief moment, lest the duties of this one might be of the briefest nature.

How then could I get in touch with my comrades who were to gather and wait for me at

the Inn of the Indies at one o'clock? A boy passed along. I had given you, Francisco, my last *marevidi* in partial payment to Bernardo Cruz for the gunpowder, but I knew that by this time the others would have been to the Cadiz banker and refilled their empty pockets, especially Pieces-of-Eight. I stopped the boy, asking him to take a note to the Inn of the Indies. He was interested until I explained that he would collect his messenger's fee at the other end. Then he leered at me, flippantly demanded if I thought he was born yesterday, and ambled off with a self-satisfied air like the young Cadiz tough that he was. A second lad insultingly felt the texture of my doublet, reached up and took my white plume between his dirty thumb and forefinger and shook it, and said fine gentlemen in fine clothes but without money could deliver their own messages. While I still felt frustrated at not being able to box the ears of these two without calling attention to myself and my mission, a third boy approached. He consented to do my errand after I had doubled my offer.

"Hand the note to the red-headed one," I said, "the one the others call Pieces-of-Eight."

"Why is he named that?" asked the boy.

"Because he is so rich. He will give you two silver *castellanos*."

A few minutes after one o'clock, all four of my friends duly arrived at the cathedral and came up to me where I stood near the upper entrance steps. I told them you two had been arrested by the Inquisition. Pieces-of-Eight brought a new Bible, according to directions contained in my note.

If the terrible tribunal got hold of the book, Francisco, we knew it would convict you absolutely, you and Pico of Hispaniola, perhaps involve all of us, and incriminate Columbus and put him at the mercy of Fonseca for trying to smuggle a letter through to the queen. And until the blow fell, Columbus would think his arrangements had been carried out. The situation was serious enough to justify any desperate enterprise to get back the Bible.

To cover all departures from the building, Doza took watch at the rear, Portugee and G. O. V. at the side doors, while Pieces-of-Eight and I accepted responsibility for the main entrance. By posting ourselves in this way as watchmen we believed it would be impossible for the Franciscan friar to slip through our fingers. Since we did not know this particular one from any others who might be leaving the cathedral, we worked out what we hoped would be a successful plan for identifying him.

We waited what seemed a long time before the priests began to file out one by one. They were all stopped, alternately by Pieces-of-Eight and me, by means of this ritual: "Excuse me, father, but will you give me permission to look up a passage in your Bible."

The first one I accosted took the book from under his arm and waited while I turned through it. Quickly I saw it contained neither the letter nor the rectangle of sailcloth with the coins. I also made sure it did not have anywhere on its fly leaves the name of Columbus, so I would know there had been no removal of the things for which I searched.

One friar, from a little distance beyond the bottom step, gazed back to catch us looking at another's Bible in the same way we had looked at his. He started to return to see what peculiar kind of Bible-reading this was, but evidently thinking our memory was poor and we were re-learning the passage, he wheeled about and went on.

The fifth man came out. It was my time to stop him, which I did with the regular formula. His face, contrary to what I expected, came back to me. I was so excited over the possibility of his having used the Bible and abstracted its hidden items that my hands shook and my whole manner was nervous and embarrassed. I quickly saw he was entirely unaware that he had any Bible other than his own.

I looked down the steps. I saw Fonseca's two soldiers and, more disturbing still, I detected a pair in civilian clothes, with sleuthing manners to identify them as spies of the Inquisition. I soon recognized these as the furtive, whispery two whose evil work had caused your arrest. Were they and the soldiers working together or separately? Was Fonseca after private evidence so he could use pressure on Columbus to give up his rights in the New World, as governor of the discovered lands and islands and as Admiral of the Ocean Sea?

"FATHER," I said, "I wish to look up the beautiful twenty-third psalm. I will not be long."

"Do not be hurried," said the priest. "It is inspiring to see young dons interested in the great poetry of the Bible. Ah, have I not seen you before? Yes, at the exhibition of the New World parrot."

There was the letter. There was the piece of sailcloth with the coins sewn to it. There was Columbus' name. And here was the Franciscan monk recognizing me. Below were the four men, the two sets of espionage agents, observing every movement I made.

"May I show the passage to my friend?" I asked.

I stepped over to him. I saw two of the Inquisition spies start toward me. Briefly, very briefly, I stood as if showing Pieces-of-Eight a page, while I whispered: "We found it. This is it. Take the new Bible to the priest. At six, and at every hour, go to the cannon mouth for the Columbus Bible. Ask the others to wait at the Inn of the Indies."

I went inside the cathedral, found the stair-

way leading up to the bell tower, and climbed the steps as hurriedly and as noiselessly as I could, looking back a score of times in fear I was being followed and, even after I was nearly to the top, listening for the far-below sound of rapid feet in belated pursuit. But I heard nothing.

The bell-ringer sat upon a big cross-timber close to the bells. He appeared as physically and mentally inert as anybody I had ever seen. He was not looking out the window at the bay and the ocean and city spread out all blue and white in three directions. He was not looking at anything. And he wasn't doing anything. He seemed neither surprised to see me nor curious as to who I was, though he probably did not have three visitors in a twelvemonth. I sat down beside him and he began at once to let me know how mistaken I was in considering him inanimate.

In front of him a sandglass emptied. As the last grain fell through the narrow outlet, he tilted it over. "In five minutes I do it again," he said. "Every ten minutes I tilt the big one. Every fifteen minutes I ring the bells. Five minutes is all I ever have to myself. My mind is full of responsibilities. I can't let it get interested in anything or be occupied with anything. I can't look, or think, or read, or work. I get so tense I could almost scream just waiting for the end of those interminable five-minute periods."

"What time does your relief come?" I asked.

"At six o'clock."

"When you leave, will you carry a package for me? There is a gold doubloon for you if it is faithfully and successfully done."

"For what you offer I will do much. Just so I don't have to carry it to a dangerous place. I can hardly count the times I have to ring the bells in order to earn a gold doubloon."

"It must remain concealed, absolutely concealed, and no mention must ever be made of it."

"I will take it, *señor*, though it sounds like a very guilty package."

"It is only a Bible."

"I do not understand such secrecy about the most innocent and greatest book in the world. But where does it go, *señor?*"

"On the wharf the city cannon stands, the one that was fired this morning, the old lombard. Leave the Bible in the cannon's mouth, and promise me you will not conceal it there without being as sure as anything in the world that no one sees you do it."

"I promise, *señor.*"

"I will watch you from this window. I can see every movement you make."

"I know, *señor.* I saw Columbus this morning. I saw him standing on the gangplank in chains. But I had to think of the five-minute sandglass and keep an eye on it and run to it."

THE relief bell-ringer came at exactly five minutes before six but it was my friend who rang the six o'clock hour, and this person who was outwardly so placid displayed astonishing energy and zest in producing the loudest possible clangor.

"Antonio," he said to the new man, "this young *caballero* wants to remain a little while so he might from this height enjoy a view of Cadiz as day turns to night."

From that lofty lookout I saw our messenger go to the cannon, near which still stood the empty keg that had not been returned to Bernardo Cruz. He looked all around carefully, two or three times, to make sure no one else was on the wharf. And no one else was, as my more comprehensive gaze told me to my great satisfaction. Next he stood by the cannon's mouth, leaning against it a little while and looking idly out to sea. Then he departed.

There was not another visitor for so long a time that I became worried. At last a second man came. Meanwhile dusk had gathered in the shortened November day and at the distance and in the gloom I could not be certain that it was Pieces-of-Eight. He took the keg on his shoulders and walked away. This seemed a little unusual until I realized that Pieces-of-Eight might be using the action as a disguise of his main purpose.

Pieces-of-Eight broke in then, and said:

But it wasn't I. It was some man who came, took up the cask, started away with it, put it down, looked into the mouth of the cannon, stuck his hand in, drew out a book. I was on my way there and was already close enough to see all this without his seeing or hearing me. It was getting darker and he did not open the book, apparently satisfied that it was only a Bible, but he stood there as if hesitating whether or not to take it. I removed my hat and cloak and rose up from behind some boxes and called out in a hoarse voice: 'Put it back. Would you steal a Bible? Who are you?'

'I work for Bernardo Cruz and come for his keg.'

Still keeping my voice hoarse, I directed him: 'Put it back, back in the cannon's mouth. Take the keg. Go!' He lost no time in shouldering the keg again and starting out. 'Halt!' I cried so loudly and unexpectedly that he dropped the keg to the planking. 'Never speak of it,' I said, 'never mention the fact that you were about to take a Bible from a public depository, and I will not report you.'

'No, no, *señor,* I will not,' he said, for the third time gathering up his keg and fleeing.

Cortes now resumed the narrative as follows:

When I came out of the cathedral, Fonseca's

pair of soldiers was still on hand. They stopped me and searched me and patted and prodded me all over to see if I had the Bible hidden somewhere under my clothes.

When they found nothing, they looked at each other in disappointment and let me go.

As I reached the bottom steps, thinking I was free, that pair of sly, whispery creatures, the two Inquisition spies, darted forth from around a corner of the cathedral.

"Halt!" shouted the one with a wedge-shaped face like a rat's. When they reached me, he said loud enough for Fonseca's unsuccessful men to hear: "Remove your hat, young *señor*, and give us the Columbus Bible concealed there on top of your head."

Mockingly, I took off the hat, bowed low, and swept the ground with the white plumes.

Fonseca's men smiled at their discomfiture. Neither set of spies bothered me further. They went off in separate directions.

Since Pieces-of-Eight and I were the ones most suspiciously seen about the cathedral entrance, we sent G. O. V. and Doza to the Franciscan monastery. Fonseca's soldiers guarded the gate and would not admit them. The next morning they went there again. They asked permission of the regular gatekeeper to see Columbus, for the soldiers were no longer on guard.

"Columbus is not here," the man said. "He has been removed."

"Where?" they asked.

"Sorry, *señores*, but we are not privileged to discuss the Admiral of the Ocean Sea or give out information about him. It is necessary to get a permit from His Excellency, Fonseca."

As I believe I mentioned once before, Pieces-of-Eight's father is a Seville banker. So he was able to arrange with the Cadiz banker for plenty of money to take care of our personal expenses as the great admiral's messengers. We thought it was proper to use the gold doubloons from the Bible to buy horses and saddles, pay for their feed and stabling on the way, and purchase a matchlock apiece for our protection. At the Cadiz horse market we found this sorrel and this gray, both good animals, and rode with all speed to Granada to deliver Columbus' secret letter to the queen.

We arrived in advance of the authorized messenger sent to Doña Juana at the court. Isabella received us kindly, but the king on his throne by her side did not look pleased. She gave us a letter for Columbus, one for Fonseca, and a money order for the admiral which Ferdinand also signed, though with a wry face —an order on the Seville bank for two thousand ducats to pay his expenses to Granada.

When we told her the Inquisition had arrested you two, she wrote out a pardon, the one we delivered to Fonseca at the *auto-da-fe* where more and more people were keeling over dead from the plague, and his hands trembled when he took it and the letter.

And all the time the Inquisition was torturing you to find out where the Bible was, Queen Isabella had it. We gave it to her, and she keeps it and cherishes it as the one Columbus read in the far-away places of the world.

Thus Cortes ended his account.

CHAPTER VIII

JOURNEY TO GRANADA

WE remained shut up five days and nights in the house on Guadalquivir Street. Each dawn, upon awakening, Pico expected to find himself attacked by the plague. I also was not spared much anxiety, having been exposed there in the dungeon. But we both completely escaped, either because Pico's fever in the New World, and my youth and robust health, had armored us against the disease, or because the fire had indeed baked it out of us. On the sixth morning we presented ourselves at the gate of the Franciscan monastery and asked for Columbus.

Meanwhile, Cortes and Pieces-of-Eight had returned to the University of Salamanca, riding past our quarters in the secluded street to tell us good-by. Their mounts were much better than before—two shining blacks now, caparisoned to the limit. They themselves wore doublets and cloaks and velvet hats and plumes that were fresh and new. I supposed that Pieces-of-Eight's rich banker father had outfitted them both. Cortes possessed a rather special talent for sharing in the good things of his wealthier and nobler friends.

"We left the other two horses with Columbus," he explained, "the sorrel and the gray, and he is keeping them for you two to ride to Granada. Well, Pieces-of-Eight, let's be on our way to the Salamanca professors. It looks at last as if our obligations are all cleared up."

"Did you pay Bernardo Cruz for the gunpowder?" I asked.

"By the beard of my grandfather, no."

"It's an even chance that Señor Cruz thinks you paid me and I pocketed the money."

"That's just it, Francisco. I am not leaving Seville until I take care of what I owe him. I will give the doubloon to a boat captain to deliver to him at Cadiz, with a *castellano* to the captain for his pains, a *castellano* to Señor Cruz for the keg, a *castellano* for your services, and an extra *castellano* for interest."

"Pieces-of-Eight," I requested soberly, "will you see that he does? It touches upon my honor in the eyes of a man who trusted me."

"He will settle it before we go," declared Pieces-of-Eight, as they rode away.

Columbus was ready to start, and merely

waited for us to get out of quarantine. He welcomed Pico eagerly and then took my hand in his big warm one and was in no hurry to let it go as he talked to me and looked down from his tallness into my upturned face.

At the end of the interview he said feelingly: "Francisco, if you care to see the chains I wore, they are in this sack." He kicked the sack with the toe of his right shoe to cause a slight, quick rattling from within. Pico lifted up the bottom and poured the clanking contents upon the ground.

"I am taking them with me to Granada," Columbus said, "to show the queen."

He gave us each a quantity of ducats for our expenses—out of the two thousand which the queen had sent him. We changed these big coins into *castellanos, marevidis,* and *blancas.*

When we set out the following sun-up, I was mounted on the sorrel horse, Pico on the gray. Columbus himself rode a mule, which was much more aristocratic and considered much more comfortable than a horse.

After we left the flatlands surrounding Seville, we traveled mostly though rough and hilly country, by trail rather than by road. Andalusia was noted for its bull-fighters in the cities, its smugglers along the coast, and its bandits in the mountains. So four soldiers accompanied us.

At the very front rode two of the soldiers, armed with firelocks and lances. Next was Columbus on his mule. Several yards behind him, so as not to disturb his solitude with our talk, came Pico and I. Four servants and four pack animals followed us. Then the other two soldiers brought up the rear.

It was a silent, treeless, songless land through which we went. And Columbus' mood was like the country's. The advance soldiers rode a considerable distance ahead of him. We rode as big a distance behind him. His tall body lifted high above the mule; his stirruped feet descended below the bulge of the animal's belly, close to the ground. He held himself very straight, never relaxing, never sitting sidewise as Spaniards often do. League after league he traveled so, as much aloof from the rest of us as if he were on a quarterdeck.

"Doesn't he ever get lonesome?" I asked.

"He never seems to," said Pico. "On a ship I have seen him stand looking out at sea for hour upon hour without speaking to a soul."

OUR small company, however, was by no means bereft of gaiety, which floated back and forth across Columbus' sober head. Pico and I joined the four soldiers and the four servants in whiling away the leagues and the hours with an endless assortment of ballads of lovers, warriors, *bandaleros,* and Moors.

One afternoon, as we sang along a lonely part of the trail above a deep ravine, we heard a still louder chorus ahead of us filling the canyon with its melody:

Rio Verde, Rio Verde!
Many a corpse is bathed in thee,
Both of Moors and eke of Christians,
Slain with swords most cruelly.

By the time this song was finished, they had come near enough for us to see a dozen men, well-mounted on high-necked Andalusian horses with tassels and fanciful trappings. Their approach had been so noisy and we now noticed they were so well-dressed that we had no suspicions regarding them. They were as like as peas in a pod. All wore green tight-fighting velvet jackets; green tight-fitting pants with rows of buttons from hips to knees; yellow handkerchiefs around their throats and yellow sashes around their waists; and green velvet berets with yellow plumes.

They rode in single file; indeed they could ride no other way, for the path here was narrow and overhung a deep chasm. In a place barely wide enough to furnish a siding, they drew up politely along the cliff edge and waited for the soldiers to pass. The leader called out: "God guard you, *señores!*"

He also explained that they were a party patrolling the country in search of robbers.

Meanwhile, our column had become less stretched-out than usual. We thought they meant to stand beside the trail until we all went by. But as soon as the two soldiers had gone on, the leader and the man behind him guided their horses back into the trail and traveled toward us until they found another place wide enough for them to draw up and let Columbus pass. To him they saluted, saying: "God be with you, sir."

"Good afternoon and thank you, *señores,*" said Columbus.

Then the two horsemen reoccupied the trail until they met Pico and me. This piecemeal passage seemed not illogical in consideration of the narrowness of the path and the short length of the turnout places. Soon, however, we looked forward and back and saw that their dozen had infiltered among us all along the trail—four were between Columbus and the lead soldiers, two between us and Columbus, six between us and the servants. And our procession had stretched out once more.

With face front again, I said to Pico: "It appears suspicious to me."

The reply did not come from Pico. There was not time. It came from behind us in a low, courteous tone. "Look this way, *señores.*"

We turned our heads and each of us gazed into the muzzle of a firelock and received instructions in tones of unchanged politeness. "The *señores* will do nothing and say nothing."

We saw not only the menacing weapons but how our two rear guards were made harmless. The terrified servants and four pack animals were between the soldiers and the robbers on the narrow trail. The soldiers could not shoot them without shooting the servants.

The four bandits ahead of Columbus gave their attention to the lead soldiers. The two ahead of Pico and me, with us taken care of from the rear, were able to attend to Columbus.

"Your doubloons, *caballero*," they commanded him.

"Miserable robbers," he shouted, "do you dare beset Columbus on his way to the queen?"

His name acted upon them like paralysis. "Pardon us, great *señor*, for God's sake!" Then they called out loudly to their confederates ahead and behind: "It is Columbus!"

This was one of many times when common men who had opposed him, later gathered abjectly around him and begged his forgiveness. It was one of the many times when, instead of meting out proper punishment, he granted full and free pardon. The contrition of these rogues was offered with so vast a courtesy that he said: "Do you wish to see the chains wherein Columbus was brought back to Spain?"

"*Sí, sí*, great admiral," said the whole dozen with eager eyes and nodding heads.

The packhorse was unloaded as he stood there in the trail, and the chains were poured out of the sack into the dust. The leader held them up in front of him and declared sadly: "A big disgrace to Spain!" Each of the other eleven highwaymen held them up and repeated with the same words and the same sad accents: "A big disgrace to Spain!"

BY traveling each day from dawn to dusk, without siestas at noon, we covered the distance from Seville to Granada by December seventeenth.

About midday we emerged from the highlands. Before us lay a green valley that was like paradise. The Sierra Nevadas lifted their snowy summits into dark rain clouds, and all around was a rampart of high ranges hemming in this incomparable plain. A winter storm was threatening. Below a black-sheeted firmament, streaked by lightning and shaken by thunder, Granada lay glistening a few leagues off inside its red-towered walls.

Two hills rose up, one of them also high-walled and numerously towered, and crowned by the Alhambra Palace. There dwelt Ferdinand and Isabella, the great sovereigns of Spain, whom Columbus promised I would see. I had never beheld a king or queen before, and was awed and made timid by the thought of soon standing in their presence.

The valley, ringed in by the everlasting heights, was God's sublime handiwork. It impressed me less than the Alhambra buildings which were the surpassing handiwork of the Moors. These in turn did not excite my expectation so much as the man and woman who sat upon thrones in one of the rooms there.

At the Bridge of Pinos, two or three leagues from Granada, Columbus halted.

"This bridge," he said, "is an important place in my life—the turning point."

"And the turning point of the world," declared Pico.

"A short distance from here at Santa Fe," Columbus went on in recollection, "I sat melancholy and dejected, hour after hour, day after day, waiting for interviews with the king and queen. They were so taken up with the glory of capturing this little valley from the Moors, and the town yonder, and that stucco palace on the hill, that they had no imagination for a vast new world. I named my conditions—governor of all lands, Admiral of the Ocean Sea, one-tenth of all the gains. The queen's grandees were indignant that I, a needy adventurer, that I, whom they had looked upon as a threadbare beggar, should ask so much. At last I became desperately weary of all the waiting—eighteen years of it, eighteen years of poverty, neglect, ridicule. So I saddled my animal and started out, meaning to leave the court of Spain forever. That was in February, fourteen ninety-two, seven years and ten months ago."

"Great admiral," said Pico, "who else in the world since the beginning of it has ever done so much in not quite eight years?"

"At this bridge," Columbus continued, "I dismounted from my mule and stood looking back, and was filled with a thousand disappointments. A royal messenger approached the bridge on a racing horse, and drew up in front of me.

" 'Columbus,' he said excitedly, 'the queen wants you to return.'

" 'Carry to her majesty the respects of Columbus and tell her he is quitting the kingdom of Castile and the kingdom of Aragon, and is going to France.'

" 'Columbus, you do not understand.'

" 'I understand that for some reason the Spanish monarchs wish still further to expose my exhausted spirit to delays, evasions, insults.'

" 'Not that any longer, Señor Columbus. Listen to what the queen said: *I undertake the enterprise for my own crown of Castile, and will pledge my jewels to raise the necessary funds.*' "

" 'You speak the truth, *señor*? Is it not a jest? The queen said that?'

" 'Her very words beyond peradventure, for a secretary wrote them down. But she did not have to pawn her jewels. There was indeed jest in the matter—not upon you, *señor*, but upon his majesty. All along he has looked very coolly on the affair, as you well know, and I am not

pretending he has changed his mind. But whose money is going to send you on your voyage, Señor Columbus? King Ferdinand's. The Aragon treasurer advanced seventeen thousand florins. So the king's money, not the queen's jewels, is sending you.' "

All the while that Columbus talked, the lightning flashed and the thunder rolled across the dark vault of heaven. "By Hurtado's cat," announced Pico, "we shall be drenched before we reach Granada."

As we came closer, we undertook unsuccessfully to count the thousand and thirty towers which Granada's walls were said to have.

About a league from town it began to rain, to send a chill wetness through our garments to the skin.

Our route became Cartuja Road and the Cartuja Street. We passed a neglected Moorish cemetery, across from which was a crude, new bull ring. Then we came to the principal gate of Granada, whence a messenger was sent to the palace to announce our arrival. We followed Elvira Street to a bridge across the Darro River, changed to another street, and still another, and stopped in front of an inn. Here we remained only long enough to change our clothes, for Columbus meant that we should present ourselves at once to Ferdinand and Isabella.

We had bought new outfits at Seville, and I would hardly have recognized Pico if I had not seen the transformation take place underneath my eyes. We admired each other, and in sober truth, each had no shame in admiring himself in the mirror, for I doubt if either of us had ever been so handsomely decked out before. The soldiers also changed into fresh uniforms. All of us were ready betimes and waited a quarter of an hour or so before Columbus appeared. From top to toe, in all his straight and commanding height, he had become a magnificent grandee.

During a lull in the rain, we started for the Alhambra Palace. Columbus went ahead on the mule. Pico and I followed at a respectful distance, side by side, with long lances held vertically. The four soldiers came in twos. Behind them was a servant leading a packhorse which carried only one item of baggage—a new, clean sack containing the chains which had been carefully washed, link by link, preparatory to being poured out on bright tile, to being lifted by a queen's delicate hands. In single file at the rear walked the remaining three servants.

After a period of climbing, we arrived at the Gate of Justice, where we all dismounted except Columbus. Pico stepped over and dropped his spear handle into one of many holes, so that its barbed point stuck high up, and the soldiers and I followed his example. The soldiers also left their firelocks here.

The horses and the servants remained without, including the man in charge of the chains.

The ponderous door swung back, not on hinges but on a pivot sunk into the foundation stone. Two sentinels in bright uniforms, appearing from somewhere within, stood at either side and called out:

"Who comes?"

"Christopher Columbus, Governor of the Indies and Admiral of the Ocean Sea."

CHAPTER IX

"HALT AND SURRENDER!"

TWO sentinels went ahead through a wall so thick that the way piercing it was like a tunnel. On the inside was another heavy portal, with the design of a key chiseled into its archstone.

A tall majordomo in blue and red and gold, accompanied by a page boy, came to conduct us into the palace. The king and queen were waiting for us in the Court of Lions.

The near prospect of standing in their presence caused awe and fright to settle at the pit of my stomach and I did my utmost to take a grip on myself to keep from trembling.

The sovereigns occupied two ordinary upholstered chairs on a slightly raised and carpeted platform, and both were bareheaded. An empty chair of the same kind was between them. I was disappointed, and said in a low tone to Pico walking sedately at my side: "Why aren't they on thrones and wearing crowns?"

Ferdinand was somewhat bald, and I was further disappointed that a king did not have enough money to keep his hair from falling out. Isabella was redheaded. She was tall for a woman, about his height, and though they were nearly the same age, he forty-eight and she forty-nine, he looked fully ten years younger. His eyes were heavy-lidded, drooping; hers, almost as blue as a Cadiz sky, were wide open, steady-gazing. He was sharp-voiced and his talk came in quick, jerky phrases. She had a voice that was naturally soft, musical, warm, but at intervals—unconsciously, helplessly—it lapsed into chilly accents of command. His countenance was by turns pouting, cynical, vacant; hers austere — frequently relieved by smiles, but the smiles passed and at once it became austere again.

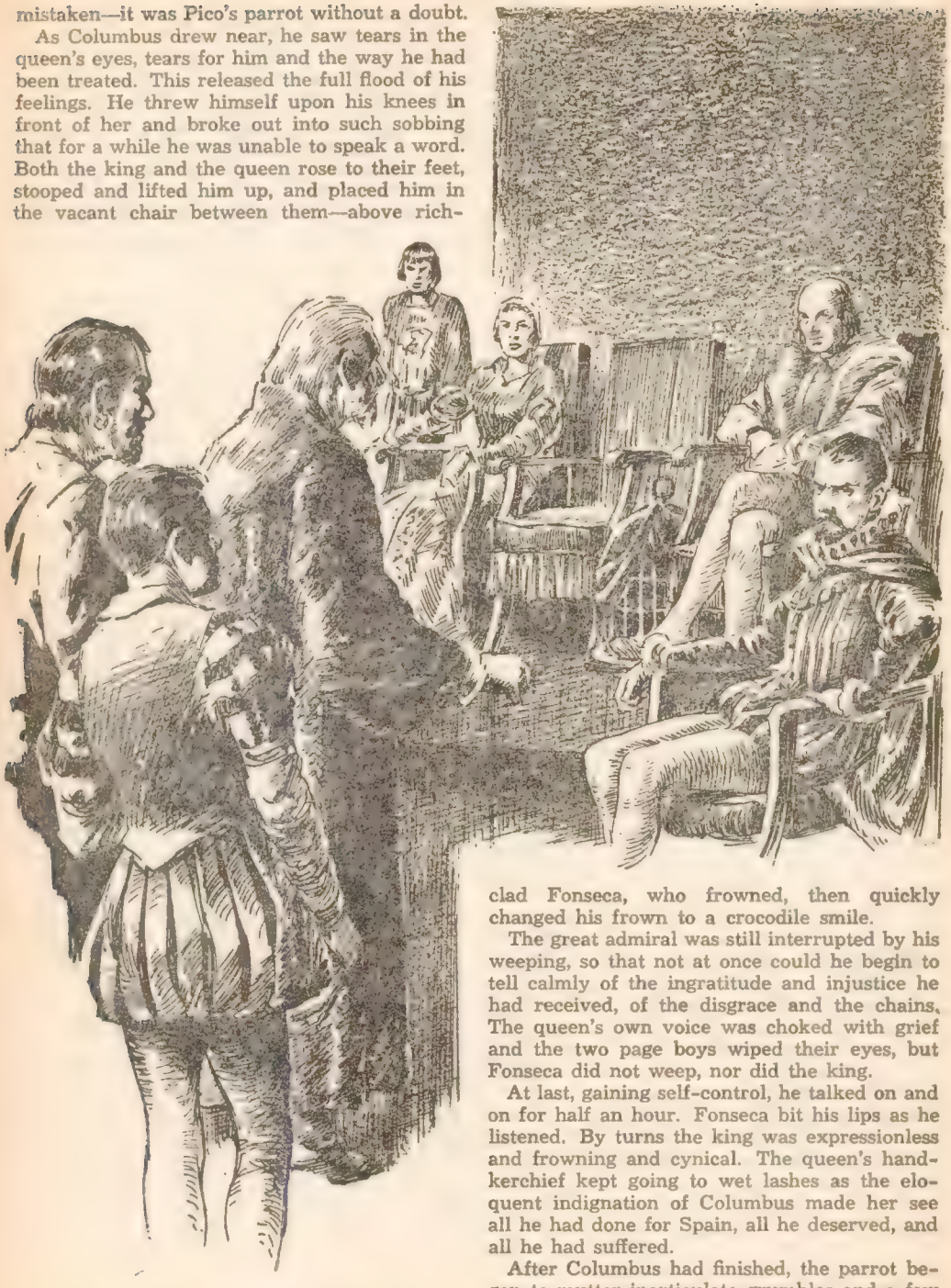
I thought of Ferdinand more as a man than a king, of Isabella more as a queen that a woman.

The monarchs were not alone. Fonseca was with them, much more richly dressed and looking more like a king than the king himself. He was not seated on the platform but below it. One page stood on the left of Ferdinand and another on the right of Isabella.

On the floor between the king's chair and the vacant chair in the center was a bird cage with a black cover over it. What it was could not be

mistaken—it was Pico's parrot without a doubt.

As Columbus drew near, he saw tears in the queen's eyes, tears for him and the way he had been treated. This released the full flood of his feelings. He threw himself upon his knees in front of her and broke out into such sobbing that for a while he was unable to speak a word. Both the king and the queen rose to their feet, stooped and lifted him up, and placed him in the vacant chair between them—above rich-



I thought of Ferdinand more as a man than a king, Isabella more as a queen than a woman.

clad Fonseca, who frowned, then quickly changed his frown to a crocodile smile.

The great admiral was still interrupted by his weeping, so that not at once could he begin to tell calmly of the ingratitude and injustice he had received, of the disgrace and the chains. The queen's own voice was choked with grief and the two page boys wiped their eyes, but Fonseca did not weep, nor did the king.

At last, gaining self-control, he talked on and on for half an hour. Fonseca bit his lips as he listened. By turns the king was expressionless and frowning and cynical. The queen's handkerchief kept going to wet lashes as the eloquent indignation of Columbus made her see all he had done for Spain, all he deserved, and all he had suffered.

After Columbus had finished, the parrot began to mutter inarticulate grumbles and a few scattered words from underneath the black cloth. The queen motioned a boy to get the cage and carry it away, but, as it was lifted up, the king reached out his right hand and took it. With the cage in his lap, Ferdinand ordered

silence in a very mild way the next time the parrot started to speak. The bird went on with whatever utterance he had commenced, the king breaking in at intervals with his low-voiced commands. 'Silence! The king is used to being obeyed. . . Silence, I say!"

Suddenly the parrot called out loud enough to be heard over the whole Court of Lions: "Silence yourself, you dirty-bearded Spaniard!"

Pico was embarrassed to have such words spoken to the king, whose beard, of course, was the cleanest in the kingdom, but the king had taunted the bird into it, and now laughed and seemed to enjoy it.

All this time the four soldiers and Pico and I had been standing at respectful attention. Isabella left the stiff and rigid soldiers as they were, but asked us if we would like to see the palace. She told her page to show us through it.

We started out. Then the page left us to curtsy to the queen. "Your Majesty, may we take the parrot?"

She smiled: "If the king can spare his company." He held out the cage to the boy.

We went over to the fountain of the dozen lions. "If you talk into one," said the page, "the talk comes out of the mouths of all twelve. Try it. Say, let the parrot try it." But the parrot chose this time to be silent. Even Pico could not get him to say anything.

At once we began to see Moorish inscriptions all about. One that seemed to be often repeated had these Arabic words: *"Wa la ghalib illa Allah*—And there is no conqueror but God."

We visited the Court of Myrtles, and from there went through a door, through a corridor piercing a nine-foot wall, and through a second door that was flush with the other side of the thick wall. This opened into a long, narrow vestible, which we crossed to step through another door into the famous Hall of Ambassadors.

THIS was the real throne room with real thrones, and with the king's crown and the queen's ready for them to put on. The three outside walls of this great chamber were so thick—thirteen feet—that the window recesses were like little rooms themselves. At the tall windows were velvet draperies reaching down to the floor. In one of the embrasures directly opposite the entrance door were the two thrones.

This hall interested me the most of all and I should have liked to spend more time in it, but the page soon led us back through the entrance door into the vestibule, which was still inside the main doors in the nine-foot wall, thence up dark, winding stairs to the top of the Tower of Comares.

From that lofty place the enchanting world was spread out all around us. To the north was a steep abyss, with the Darro River in its depths. The bottom of the tower wall, a dizzy distance below, stood buried in the gorge side which was almost as straight up and down as the Moorish masonry itself.

For close upon an hour there had been a cessation of the rain. Only once or twice had flashes lit to vivid whiteness the alabaster basin in the Court of Lions, and only a few low, distant rumblings of thunder had served as a solemn backdrop of sound while Columbus talked. We now observed that the storm had retreated toward the Sierra Nevadas, with a rearguard of black, ragged cloud streamers following mountainward from over the Alhambra and all the fertile plain. But behind us, another black bank was boiling up above the lower mountain rim in that direction.

We heard rapid steps and shortly the second page boy rose up from the stairwell. He walked over to the sailor and bowed and said: "Señor Pico of Hispaniola, the Admiral of the Ocean Sea asks that you fetch the chains from the gate. Her Majesty wishes to see them, *señor*, and she is waiting."

The boy went at once to the stair-opening and began to descend. Pico, saying he would rejoin us soon, followed. Our guide, with the look of one missing a treat, spoke to me. *"Señor,* if you do not mind waiting alone, I should also like to see the chains."

"Go, of course," I said.

He was holding the cage. "Shall I leave the parrot or take him?"

"As you wish."

"El diablo!" exclaimed the bird, as if waking from sleep in a bad mood.

"I think he's going to talk now. I'll take him."

He left with all speed to join the others.

After spending perhaps another ten minutes at the top of the tower, I went down the corkscrew stairs to resurvey the throne room from which I had been led away too soon to suit me. I do not know how long I had been here—it did not seem long—when I heard voices and looked through the three open doors to see the king and Fonseca approaching. If I tried to get out now, I could not avoid meeting them face to face. Thought of doing this filled me with a kind of panic. Yielding to my impulses of timidity or fright, I scurried to an embrasure and hid behind a pair of the long window hangings.

The king and Fonseca entered, pushed the door to behind them, and walked across the big hall. Ferdinand threw himself wearily into his throne, but I noticed he did not ask Fonseca to make himself comfortable alongside, close for talking, on the throne of Isabella. He sat in an ordinary chair down below.

The king put a leg over an arm of his throne, yawned so wide it was almost catching for me behind the drape, and in the middle of his yawn said: *"Hombre,* but I'm tired. That blubbering

of Columbus and the queen was about all I could stand. By coming here we have escaped another spell of it over the chains. But what are we to do about the admiral? That is what I want to discuss with you, Fonseca."

"It is easy, Sire. Repudiate the contract that makes him governor and admiral and all the rest."

"But a king's written word, Fonseca, and a queen's, cannot be given and taken back at every change of the wind. The people would lose all faith in it."

"Well, Columbus says himself that Hispaniola is the site of King Solomon's mines."

"I hope," said Ferdinand ruefully, "that Solomon got more gold from there than I have."

"Such fancies destroy his own case," continued Fonseca. "You can tell him very reasonably that he didn't discover anything. He also says he found one of the four rivers flowing out of the Garden of Eden. And that puts him into pretty old country, Your Majesty. So, by his own admission, he didn't discover these places at all."

"Then any other country—Portugal, England, France—would have as good right to the lands as Spain. No, we can't use that argument."

"Very well, Sire, we can shut out other countries by declaring with sober faces that Averroes was the actual discoverer, and Averroes was a good Spaniard of three hundred years ago."

"But didn't Averroes get everything of his from Ptolemy, and doesn't Ptolemy belong to Portugal, say, as much as he does to Spain? It is too risky."

"We can accuse him, then, of getting his ideas from Erastothenes, an old Greek of seventeen centuries back."

"Columbus would only need to say: 'What if Ptolemy, Erastothenes, and all the rest declared that ships could reach Cathay by sailing west from Spain? Why didn't any of them ever do it?'"

"I know not what else to suggest to Your Majesty."

"DID you find nothing about this Montezuma god to make Columbus disloyal, so he would be willing to give up his claims in order to clear himself?"

"Nothing, Sire. The scholars at Seville could not put their fingers on a thing. There is no record that any Montezuma was worshipped in the kingdoms of Prester John and the Great Khan, and this god is not once mentioned by Pliny, Strabo, Marco Polo, or Mandeville. Several of Columbus' ex-sailors were questioned. They said that parrots in the New World are as thick as olives on an olive tree and were taught all sorts of gibberish and nonsense and profanity. They recollected that in a very few instances a bird had been brought in from some place far away, which chattered in a foreign language, ending up one of its rigmaroles with what seemed like the word Montezuma. The natives claimed that they understood nothing of the creature's speech."

The king put a leg over the arm of his throne, yawned and said: "Hombre, *but I'm tired.*"

The door opened. The page boy, probably in search of me, stuck his head in, saw Ferdinand and Fonseca, and immediately withdrew. From the moment he opened the door until he closed it upon his retreat there came from the cage in his hands these words in a rapid flow: "*Caramba! El diablo! Por Dios!* Lord, my lord. . ."

"Sire," asked Fonseca, "did you notice how from coarse utterance of profanity the voice abruptly changed to a reverential tone, indicating the bird has copied a human's adoration of a lord so exalted as to be supposed celestial rather than mortal?"

"You think he's some god or other?"

"Yes, Your Majesty. If he were a man at all, and one anybody knew, we could trump up strong charges that this was a new king Columbus was going over to. But since he's probably a heathen deity and there's not a soul to testify that Columbus ever worshipped him, we can do

naught but forget the whole matter of Montezuma."

"So it looks, Fonseca, as if Columbus has us tied hand and foot by that unfortunate contract. The queen and I were foolish ever to promise so much in writing and then sign it and stamp it with the Great Seal of Spain."

"Possibly Your Majesty can trade him titles in Spain for the troublesome ones he has."

"He refuses. I have offered to make him a grandee in the Appenines or a duke in Seville. He answers no. He refuses to quit as Governor of the Indies and Admiral of the Ocean Sea, with ten percent of the New World income."

"Will you return him, then, to Santo Domingo as governor?"

"How can I, Fonseca? He is a good navigator but unable to handle men. Everything concerned with managing other people fails. If it's on sea, it's mutiny. If it's on land, it's rebellion. This is partly because of his being an Italian. Spaniards don't like to take orders from a foreigner. So Columbus remains a deep thorn in the flesh, with no way for us to remove it."

"One way, Sire. We can postpone action on every promise, always take much time, wear him down, and eventually he will die. The Lord thus settles many hard problems."

"That seems the only thing to do. We are forced to tell him he will be restored to his dignities as soon as things quiet down in Hispaniola, but we shall be in no hurry, no hurry at all, Fonseca."

The king took his leg from over the arm of the throne chair, stretched in another big yawn, and strode toward the entrance, with Fonseca walking by his side.

"Will you be returning here this evening, Sire?"

"No," said the king.

"Then I will lock the door; the jeweled crowns could be stolen."

"I sometimes wish, Fonseca, that mine were. It is heavy on the head, a weary load."

Fonseca stepped to the stair door, opened it, and called up the stairwell: "Anybody there? Anybody in the tower?"

There was no answer. The king and grandee passed through the big door of the main wall, leading to the Court of Myrtles, and closed it after him. The last noise I heard of their departures was that of the bolt sliding to.

So there I was locked in the throne room.

I HAD remained perfectly still. Neither Ferdinand nor Fonseca had been troubled by the faintest suspicion that anybody was in the great chamber besides themselves. Would I be condemned to death when they learned I had been listening to everything there behind the arras? How could I get out of the room without their knowing? Better to be found anywhere else than here in these forbidden precincts, able to explain my presence only by saying I had been present during a secret conference of the king. With the Inquisition fresh in my experience, I was sure my offense would meet the death penalty.

I went out into the antechamber and opened the door leading to Comares Tower, as Fonseca had done, and mounted the steps, rapidly at first until I was alarmed by the tap of my shoes upon the stones, and then almost silently creeping. There lay the city and over it the threat of an immediate storm. The clouds were black. The lightning flashed. The thunder pealed. The wide, wild turmoil of the weather emphasized my own feeling of helplessness.

It was a vast distance straight down the wall to the steep sides of the gorge out of which the tower rose. Still farther below, at the bottom of the canyon, was the Darro River. The freedom of it in the lightning and thunder made it seem as desirable as it was impossible. The mere thought of an exit here was foolish.

I descended the tower stairs into the antechamber. There was no way but to hammer on the door till an attendant came and let me out and took me to the king and queen to confess all. If the queen should be inclined to mercy, still the king and Fonseca, in spite of her, would find a means of putting me out of the way and closing my mouth.

I reentered the throne room. Not at first having pounded on the door to attract attention, I made my case look worse each hour I stayed. I kept on waiting and hesitating. Through the windows I could see the rain, falling now in a deluge. Then night came. There was utter silence, apart from the rumbling and crashing of the thunder. There was black darkness in the great chamber except when lightning flashes brightened it instantaneously from wall to wall. The Alhambra bell struck midnight.

In fascination I approached the throne chairs, felt their smooth, soft upholstery in the night, lifted Ferdinand's crown in my hands. My pulses beat fast with a consciousness of guilt, but I could not resist what I then did in profanation and sacrilege. As helplessly as if mesmerized, I climbed into Ferdinand's throne. I put his crown upon my head.

Suddenly there came a bright and prolonged lightning flash, surprising me in my desecration as a robber is surprised by a torch. That brilliant illumination seemed to be revealing me to the monarchs, to the court, to all the people of Spain. In recoil from my deed, I jumped from the throne and in my excitement almost dropped the crown before I could set it down in its regular place. I ran to a window embrasure and huddled there like a criminal.

Pulling the heavy draperies about me, first for concealment, later for warmth, I began at length to think of them for still another service.

These arras must be a dozen feet wide, a dozen feet long. They were of heavy material. I had my knife, my short dagger-like knife. I could slit one drapery into strips and, if this were not enough, as many more as might be needed.

I went up to the tower to reconnoiter again. Where the towers were part of the palace there were no guards, none here in Comares, none in the first tower toward the east. Only when the walls ran along outside the buildings were the towers guarded. There was a guard to the west, but the station was several fathoms distant. There was one in the second tower to the east.

All this I saw at intervals in the lightning, and in what was now a drenching rain.

Back in the throne room, I pulled down a hanging from a window. I judged that strips three inches wide of this heavy fabric would be strong enough to support me. The vast yardage gave me forty-eight strips twelve feet long, or about four hundred feet after the pieces were knotted together.

It would not do to leave this drapery rope behind me. If it were known someone had got out of the tower thus, the search would be more rigid, suspicions would arise regarding an outlaw presence in the throne room, and the whole affair could be more easily connected with me. I hoped by taking the cord with me and by not being seen, to conceal the very fact that there had been an escape. I tied the ends together around a post of the embattlement; the four-hundred-foot rope made a loop that would reach down two hundred feet, all the length needed. When I landed, I could untie a knot and keep pulling until I had the slashed drapery to take with me.

Someday in the throne room there would be the mystery of one stolen hanging, and nothing else.

BY lightning flashes, I had seen that the lower end of my loop touched the rocks and bushes at the base of the tower, but the ground here was so steep I wondered if I could keep my footing on it when I turned loose and began to pull down the cord.

I let myself over the embattlement of the tower. The rain was descending in a downpour. The thunder continued rolling and breaking in claps, and the lightning flashes were the biggest threat to my enterprise. About halfway down, I thought a lightning bolt had hit me. It did indeed hit the tower wall.

Immediately there was a cry: "Guards of the wall, a man escaping! A man escaping from the Tower of Comares!"

This came from the man at the second tower to the east. The man to the west shouted: "Halt! Halt on the wall! Halt and surrender!" Both these guards began to fire, but their shots went wild.

About halfway down, I thought a lightning bolt had hit me. Immediately there was a cry: "Guards of the wall, a man escaping!"

I slid down the rope as fast as I could. Its softness was a help, increasing my grip and not blistering my palms and fingers. When my feet touched bottom, they felt for a level place while I still held on to the double cord of the loop with one hand. With the other hand and with my heels, I dug a flat place to stand on. I untied a knot and began to pull. The whole length of the loop was soon wadded up in my arms. I started down the slope, scrambling, jumping, falling.

Firelocks sent their shots wildly after me as I hurried.

At the Darro River, I was prevented by buildings and walls from going along the bank where I was. I must ford the river, since I heard the increasing noises of pursuit. I could see by the lightning that the river was not in flood, its current not filling all the bed. I found a dead tree washed up on the bank and looped the rope over a limb so I could again pull it after me when I was across.

I heard a man nearby say: "He came this way—straight down from the tower."

I threw myself into the current. It was not deep, but swift. As I heard the approach of men I went downstream instead of across, so the buildings and walls would shield me from view. The rope was not kept taut behind me. I simply held to the end of the loop. I continued downstream until this drew me up with a jerk, as a fish is stopped at the end of a line. The loop-end was over my right wrist. I swung around until my feet trailed in the current.

I heard the same voice again. "What happened to him? He must have crossed the river. Yes, that's what he did. Here is his rope he used to pull himself back in case he got into deep water or difficulties. We will take it along for evidence."

Suddenly I found myself going rapidly downstream towing the loose rope after me.

"It was jerked out of my hands!" exclaimed the man.

When I reached the bridge over which we had crossed that morning, I crawled back under it. I found a boulder about as big as a farmer's basket. I dug under this, put the wet cloth in, covered it up, listened, crawled out, listened again, climbed up to the bridge, and crossed.

At the inn I found the room jointly assigned to Pico and me. He was asleep, but the parrot wasn't. *"El diablo!"* said the latter.

CHAPTER X

SWEET REVENGE

I INFORMED Columbus of everything I had heard in the throne room. He listened with a grave face and occasionally frowned. When I was through, he said he was not surprised—the king had always opposed his projects, and Fonseca hated him with all the wormwood in his veins.

"Why is Fonseca such a bitter enemy?" I asked.

"There are too many reasons to go into now, Francisco. I will mention two. Before my first voyage he called me the pauper pilot. A second reason started at Cadiz just before I left on the second voyage. Fonseca's deputy, Jimeno de Berviesca, was rude and disrespectful to me. So I kicked him, I kicked him with my own foot and struck him with my own hand—I kicked and struck him publicly. Fonesca tried to make a scandal out of it and to hurt me with the monarchs because I had lost my temper and my dignity. He failed at that time when I had just given Spain a New World, but it is different now."

"Yes," I agreed, "they have all the glory they think you can give them, great admiral, and don't need you any more. The king and Fonseca mean to block everything and wait hopefully for you to die."

"Francisco, I am not old enough or tired enough to die. Besides, while those two were so neatly settling my case, the queen was promising that, after some delay, I will be restored to my titles and honors."

Which would prevail, the queen's word or the king's and Fonseca's underhandedness?

December passed and the year 1500 ended. Columbus was kept on tenterhooks at Granada for nine long months of the year 1501. Finally he had definite promises; yet Fonseca's hindrances and delays caused that year to fade into 1502. Then four more months went by.

At last, on the ninth of May, 1502, Columbus sailed out of Cadiz harbor on his fourth voyage.

He had four caravels—*Capitana, Santiago de Palos, Gallego, Vizcaino.* The four crews numbered a hundred and forty men, and, by Lucifer's Adam's apple, a good third of them were a sullen, sorry lot.

Meanwhile, what had been happening to Pico and me?

Columbus gave us the horses—the sorrel to me, the gray to the sailor. Pico then started out on horseback to exhibit the parrot in all the principal cities of Spain from Malaga to San Sebastian, until the admiral should summon him for the next voyage. He wrote me as follows several weeks after he had left Granada:

"The horse and I, and the parrot himself, all live off the parrot. By Hurtado's cat, we have averaged a thousand *marevidi* a month. Montezuma, whether man or god, ought to feel happy over all the notice he is getting in Spain."

The king and queen had given him a note of endorsement before he started out: "This bird, belonging to our worthy subject, Pico of Hispaniola, has amused us at the palace. I, Ferdinand. I, Isabella."

And the king added: "Zounds, I mean it. I

like the parrot. His talk is better than that of dull courtiers. I will give you ten gold ducats for him if you care to sell him."

I also had to find some way to make a living while Columbus waited and kept his temper and contended with the obstructions of Fonseca. He gave me a letter of recommendation to the owner of the Guadalquivir Gunpowder Works at Seville. I did not think that Bernardo Cruz would take me back. Besides, the Seville establishment paid better wages. It was a good place to work, though I sometimes thought enviously how much gayer and easier it was to get bread and meat by means of a parrot's prattle.

Late one afternoon when I was down at the wharf to see the Cadiz boat come in, my former employer stepped ashore. No less than formerly, he waddled when he walked, but now he didn't walk far, only to a carriage for hire. I approached and placed myself in front of him, feeling a kind of gladness at seeing him and eagerly hoping he would be friendly.

"Señor Cruz," I inquired, "did you receive the gold doubloon from Cortes for the gunpowder, a *castellano* for my time, a *castellano* for the keg, and a *castellano* for interest?"

He drew his rotund body up in dignity. "Who is it accosts me? Who has the bad manners to intercept me on my way to a carriage? What stranger dares to speak to me familiarly? Begone! I wish to have nothing to do with you. Out of my sight, I say!"

The Seville Inquisition paid me back all my money, without deductions. The secretary said Pico would have everything returned to him at Barcelona, where he was then exhibiting the parrot.

As soon as the fourth voyage was assured and funds were advanced for supplies and expenses, Columbus called both Pico and me to Cadiz to help him get ready. Pico was appointed chief cannoneer. I was made his assistant. One of our duties was to buy all the cannon and lombards needed, all the matchlocks, all the gunpowder and ball.

I had told Pico about Señor Cruz in detail, mentioning the episode on the Seville wharf.

"Under the circumstances," said the sailor, "I think you are the one to visit Bernardo Cruz officially as the gunpowder buyer for Columbus' fourth voyage."

I WENT to the familiar establishment, and a hundred pleasant recollections welled up to take off the sharp edge of retaliation. Timid Felipe, the charcoal maker, was the first workman I ran into. After we had embraced and pounded each other on the back in gladness, I said: "Please announce me to Señor Cruz."

Emilio came over from his task several paces distant and embraced me no less warmly than Felipe had done. "Can I see you some day soon after work, Francisco?"

"At the Inn of the Indies on Thursday."

Felipe returned and said: "Señor Cruz says for you to begone!"

"Return to him, Felipe, and announce that the gunpowder buyer for Columbus' fourth voyage is here."

Señor Cruz came at once, all humble apologies, all deferential friendliness, all petitions for pardon. I ignored his effusiveness. I ignored his proffered hand. I looked at him as at a stranger and announced: "I wish to buy five hundred kegs of gunpowder to be delivered to the Cadiz wharf by the first of May."

"I can furnish it. Of the highest grade."

"Do you still make your men line up outside fifteen minutes before time to go to work?"

"It is still the rule, Francisco, but Emilio is not so punctual any more. His mother died last fall. It seems to have been her influence that made him so reliable. I have had to reprimand him three times for being late."

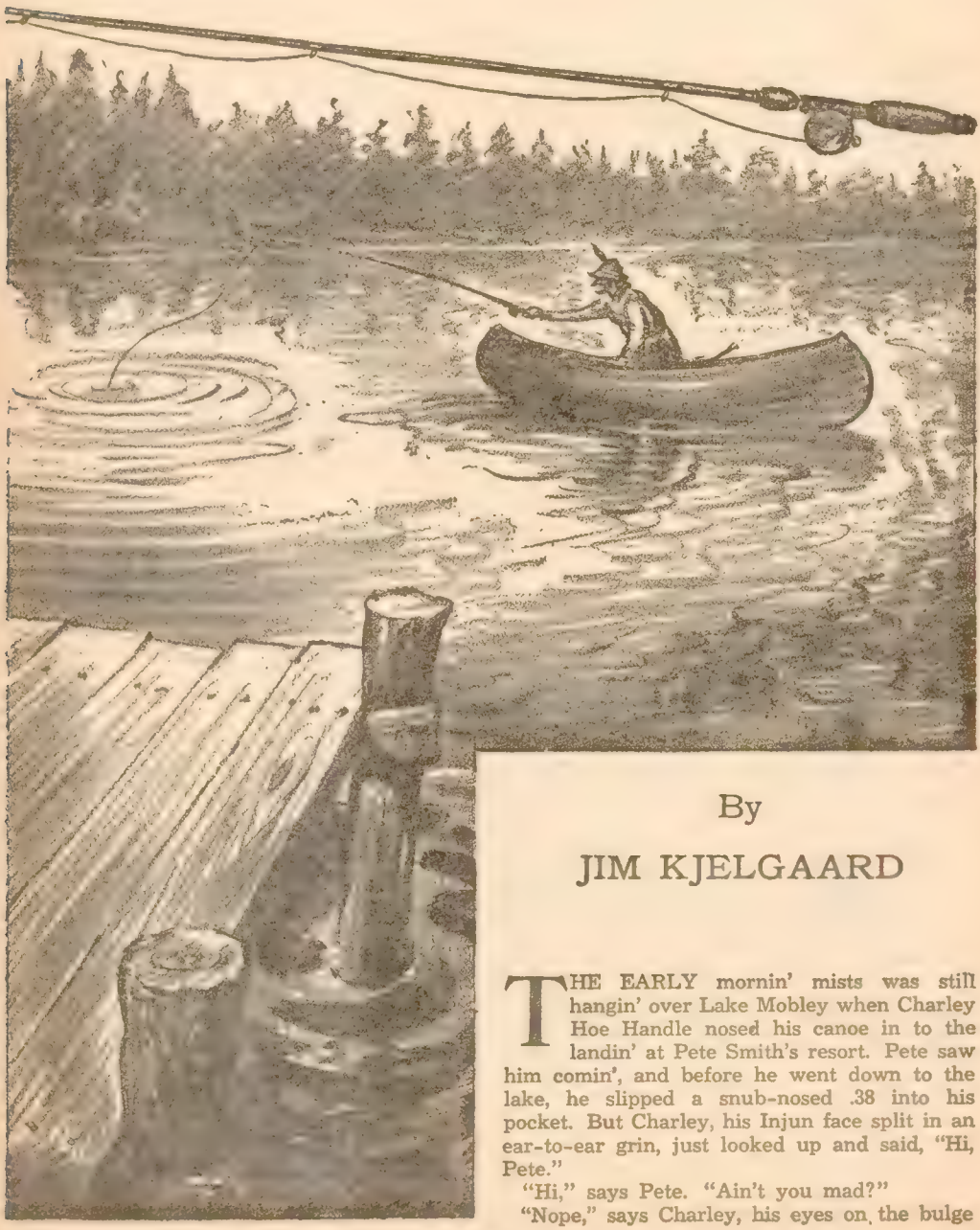
"As long as this lining-up continues, Señor Cruz, I am afraid we cannot purchase your gunpowder. We shall be compelled to buy it all, rather than just half as we intended, from the Guadalquivir Gunpowder Works."

(Continued on page 143)

ILLUSTRATED BY
PETER KUHLHOFF

He was throwin' his arm away in those weeds, and all the while Pete Smith sat on the pier, smirkin' a little bit more with every cast Charley made.

CHARLEY HOE HANDLE AND THE RELUCTANT MUSKIE



By

JIM KJELGAARD

THE EARLY mornin' mists was still hangin' over Lake Mobley when Charley Hoe Handle nosed his canoe in to the landin' at Pete Smith's resort. Pete saw him comin', and before he went down to the lake, he slipped a snub-nosed .38 into his pocket. But Charley, his Injun face split in an ear-to-ear grin, just looked up and said, "Hi, Pete."

"Hi," says Pete. "Ain't you mad?"

"Nope," says Charley, his eyes on the bulge

made by the .38. "A man shouldn't ought to get mad because he's been outsmarted."

"That's good," Pete says, and he heaved a big sigh of relief. Two weeks ago he had went up and bought the mortgage, for eighty-nine dollars, on the camp where Charley was livin'. Charley wanted the place for a home. Pete needed it for a fall deer-huntin' camp, and had had the sheriff tell Charley to get out. But, sinst you never can tell what an Injun's goin' to do, Pete had expected Charley would come lookin' for him wavin' a tomahawk. Pete looked over the gear in Charley's canoe—a blanket, a skillet, and, of all things, a big ten-gallon milk can. But neither can you ever tell what an Injun' goin' to haul around in his canoe.

"What are you doin' down here?" says Pete.

"Oh," says Charley, "lookin' for a job. I got to earn enough to make a down payment on another camp, seein' as you got mine."

"Well," says Pete, who was hard up for help, "I can give you a job. Seven dollars a day an' found to guide fishermen."

Charley's grin broadened, and Pete trimmed his sails quite a few degrees. He knew for sure that Charley was craftier than a shot-stung buck, and he might be fooled once but he couldn't be twice. Charley knew that Pete would pay him seven dollars a day to guide fishermen, and charge twelve dollars for his services.

But right then they were interrupted by Mr. William Sparling.

This William Sparling, he had more money than a chain drugstore's got pills. But he was a good sport and fisherman, and he had come to Pete's resort to catch a muskie. For six days now he had fished Lake Mobley with everything in his kit, and hadn't had a strike. Pete had explained that that's the way it was with muskies, they might hit and they might not, and William Sparling knew that was so because he had heard it from other fishermen. He wasn't hollerin' about hard luck.

But there was one little item that William Sparling didn't know and Pete did. Because there was muskie in all the lakes around, Mobley was listed as a muskie lake. But there wasn't any there. Pete had fished, seined, setlined and everything else, and had never brought up a muskie. When he had enough guides, Pete sent his muskie fishermen to other lakes. But this year there wasn't any guides. However, as long as William Sparling didn't know there wasn't any muskies in Mobley, he was willin' to keep on tryin' to catch one and to pay the fancy prices Pete charged at his resort. But right now William Sparling was interested in Charley and his canoe.

"My word!" says he. "You look as though you'd been on a forest jaunt."

"I have been," says Charley. "What you been doin'?"

"Trying to catch a muskie," says William Sparling.

"Don't tell me Pete ain't been able to show you one," says Charley.

"Not yet. But it isn't Pete's fault."

"Pete," says Charley, "you're slippin'."

Pete just stood at the landin', not knowin' whether to bust out laughin', cryin', or neither. He had started to sweat when Charley and William Sparling got together. But was it possible Charley didn't know, either, that there wasn't any muskies in Mobley? Pete thought back as hard as he could, and he couldn't remember Charley ever fishin' this lake. He had fished the lakes to the north, and if there was one muskie in any of 'em that aimed to bite, Charley would get it. But even Charley couldn't catch any where there wasn't any to catch. Pete decided to play his cards the way they had been dealt.

"I suppose," he says, careful-like, "that you could show him a muskie?"

"Oh, you're darn tootin'," says Charley.

"In Lake Mobley?"

"Mobley or any other lake," says Charley.

Pete was fairly singin' inside, he was that happy. And he knew he had Charley hooked hard and fast because no Injun, no matter how smart, can resist a gamble.

"Would you bet on that?" says Pete.

Charley sort of hedged. "I—I ain't got any money."

"You don't need any," says Pete. "I'll put up two hundred and ten dollars an' let Mr. Sparling hold it. You win, you get it. You lose, you guide thirty days for me for found an' no pay."

"A sporting proposition!" says William Sparling. "Why don't you accept, Mr. . . . Mr. . . .?"

"Hoe Handle," says Charley. "Charley Hoe Handle."

"Can you really catch a muskie here?"

"Sure."

"Well," says Pete, "if you cover that bet, we ought to have a time limit."

Charley Hoe Handle's grin got just a trifle bigger. "Aw right," says he. "I got to catch a muskie out of Lake Mobley by five o'clock this afternoon."

PETE SMITH and William Sparling sat all mornin' on the landin' watchin' Charley Hoe Handle try to catch a muskie. The lake was narrow in front of Pete's resort, and shallow from the opposite bank to about a hundred and sixty feet out. Weeds made a thick growth there, and Charley Hoe Handle was fishin' in the weeds.

First he used a surface plug, skitterin' it all through the weeds and draggin' it back to his canoe. And you could see that he knew how to fish for muskies by the way he was skitterin'

the plug. He didn't retrieve it in little jerks, and let it rest between, like a bass fisherman might. He didn't haul it in alternatin' slow and fast, like a pike fisherman might. Charley Hoe Handle was really fishin' for muskies, and givin' 'em all he had.

They're a special fish in a class of their own, and you never know what they're goin' to do or how they're goin' to do it. They might hit a fast plug, or a slow one. They might not hit at all. And a surface plug's the worst of all because it's hard for a muskie to take anything off the surface. But, when Charley Hoe Handle had tried all the surface plugs he had, it was sure that if there had been a muskie around that aimed to hit one, it would of hit his.

But none hit, and Charley shifted to a divin' plug. He threw that all over the weeds, and got it caught quite a few times. Each time it caught, makin' hardly a ripple in the weeds, Charley would just paddle his canoe over and loosen it. Finally he tried another divin' plug, and another, and another.

He was throwin' his arm away in those weeds, and all the while Pete Smith sat on the pier, smirkin' a little bit more with every cast Charley made. He was tickled, partly because he'd made a sure bet and the best fishin' guide in the country would be bound to work for him for nothin'. And he was awful amused because Charley Hoe Handle was out there givin' a perfect demonstration of how to fish for muskies when there wasn't any in the lake.

Just after noon, Charley Hoe Handle gave up plug castin' and came paddlin' up to the pier. He was still grinnin', and not at all mad. He kicked over a sod, picked up a couple of worms, put a hook on his castin' line, baited it with worms, and chucked it into a little stream that meandered into Mobley. About five minutes later he hauled out a half pound sucker, and Pete Smith liked to kill hisself laughin'.

"What's the matter?" says William Sparling.

"I was thinkin'—" Pete cast about for an excuse. "I was thinkin' how funny it would of been if he'd of caught a muskie on worms in that little crick."

"Ha-ha," William Sparling laughs, just to be polite. "Are you going to use that sucker for bait now, Mr. Hoe Handle?"

"Sure thing," Charley says. "Now watch my smoke."

Pete Smith bubbled out laughin' again, and shut when William Sparling looked at him. But he was still laughin' deep inside. It was awful funny, the trouble this Injun was goin' to to catch a muskie where there wasn't any. But Charley Hoe Handle just rowed out to the weeds, stood up, and cast his sucker. Pete Smith lay down to doze until five o'clock came and the fool Injun had lost his bet. But he was woke up quick by William Sparling yellin'.

"He has one! He's fighting one!"

Pete sat up like he'd been prodded by an electric goad. Sure enough, Charley Hoe Handle's rod was bent double. His taut line was singin' through the water. Pete sat, bug-eyed, watchin' Charley play his fish. An hour later Charley brought it to gaff, and Pete saw him hoist a big muskie over the side of the canoe and start for shore.

PETE WAS still sittin', in his mind watchin' two hundred and ten dollars flit away, when Charley brought his fish in to the pier. It was a muskie, a thirty-pound tiger-stripe, and William Sparling grinned all over the place.

He was as excited as a kid.

"It's just three-fifteen," he says to Pete. "He won fairly, didn't he?"

"Yes," Pete says weakly, "he won. Pay him off."

William Sparling counted two hundred and ten dollars, Pete's money, into Charley Hoe Handle's hand, and Charley stuck it away in a greasy old tobacco pouch. But Pete Smith's prize customer was lookin' at the muskie. He took it by the gills, hefted it, and laid it on the ground to look at. His eyes was really bugged out.

"What a fish!" he says. "I'd give anything to catch one!"

"You really wanna catch one?" says Charley, innocent as you please.

"I sure do!"

"Well," says Charley Hoe Handle, "Mobley ain't so good for muskies. I had to fish hard for this one. But for ten dollars a day, if you wanna rough it, I'll take you up to Pelican Lake. You can really get 'em there."

"Good heavens!" says William Sparling. "That's a real bargain! I'll go get my gear right away."

He ran up to get his tackle, and Pete Smith sat tryin' to look holes through the only muskie ever caught out of Mobley Lake. He says, "I thought I had you hooked, Charley, I really did."

"I know you did." Charley Hoe Handle was grinnin' awful wide now. "Thanks for the money, Pete. I can buy a better camp than the one you bought out from under me."

"Charley," says Pete, "it will be worth more than the money I paid you if you tell me how you got him out of this lake."

Charley Hoe Handle looked up at Pete's resort. He saw William Sparling, with his gear in his hands, come dancin' down toward the dock.

"It's easy," he says. "All you got to do is fish Pelican Lake, catch a muskie, bring it down here in a milk can, turn it loose, and catch it again. Here comes my fisherman. So long, Pete."

(Continued from page 6)

ance of the Baltimore clippers, made it once a year—up the China seas from Singapore before the southwest monsoon, and back again before the northeast monsoon. That's a year! But the vessels with clipper hulls—never mind the rig, now!—were not only faster but more weatherly, they could claw up a lee shore much better. It was uncomfortable, slogging steadily to windward for weeks against the northeast monsoon; it was particularly uncomfortable for the hands, crammed into such a narrow forecastle; but brother, it certainly was profitable!

Also, it was very dangerous. You had to get in very close sometimes, and those seas were uncharted in those days, and of course unlighted.

The *Hannah* was a bark, and she was a clipper. Now let's not have any arguments about that.

Since Jasper Green is taking his cargo to the Whampoa anchorage or to Macao, with no mention of Hong Kong, this story clearly is laid in the days before the First Opium War, which came off in 1840-1. In other words (since no clippers were known in those parts much earlier, if *any* earlier) in the 1830's.

Now I'll admit that in the 1830's Jasper Green might not have referred to the *Hannah* as a clipper. I don't know. And I don't think anybody else does. The experts are frank to admit that they don't know when the expression came into common use in sailors' speech—which is a very different thing from when it got itself into print. The Oxford Dictionary traces the printed use of the verb "to clip", meaning to go right along darn' fast, to 1613. No doubt men said it long before that time.

So light right into me with your beefs if you think you've caught me in a boner but no howls at my calling the *Hannah* a clipper. I've prepared my defenses ahead of the deluge.

IN the August *Ask Adventure* section we published a query from Capt. George H. Morrill, F.A., stationed at Beloit, Wisconsin, on the care and feeding of night crawlers, that succulent garden hackle so beloved by the bass that infest those northern lakes. Jack Knight, our fresh water fishing expert, replied, giving his pet method for keeping crawlers happy in captivity. Now Bill Gianella of Oakland, California, comes through with an alternative nurturing-plan—

Dear Captain Morrill,

I do not wish to be understood as implying that the method mentioned in *Adventure* is not good. It is good! The more holes that are made for drainage the better. We should bear in mind that we drain to give the worms air, and the more air circulation—as long as other necessary conditions are right—the more worms can be kept to a given volume of living quarters. So make as many holes as your patience will permit.

I have several times kept almost a pint of angle worms in a gallon can for a month to six weeks when I had to take bait from the "low country" where it was plentiful to the high Sierras where angle worms were not to be had. I believe that a five gallon can (oil can) with the side cut out would make a happy home for some two to three quarts of them. Naturally, for longer periods, it is quite probable that less worms would work better.

To make the kind of a "bugs home" I recommend, take a punch and grind the point so that instead of being like a prick-punch it is square instead of round. Punch the holes from outside in so that the points stick up like a cheese grater and only leave about 1/16″ opening between the points. No worm will try to crawl out through such a setup. If the holes are made smooth they must be made too small.

Now for the material to keep them in. If you can tear moss off of the rocks it is the best thing I know of. If you can't get it in the natural state you can buy moss at a florist's shop, the moss used to make up some of the florist's creations will do.

For feed give them small doses of spent coffee grounds.

In watering, about once a week pour through enough water to give a good flushing out. At other times give just enough to keep the worms active. At no time let the moss get so dry they bunch up. When they bunch something is wrong, also they will smother.

Whenever the worms are tended, pull up some of the lower moss and check the smell. Healthy worms have no stink. Neither do they crowd together.

Always keep the "bugs home" out of the sun, they can't stand more than the usual temperatures of the ground. When one goes fishing the same thing applies. Take them in moss, see that they have air, see that they have moisture enough not to crowd, to conserve moisture, and then they will not suffocate and stink. Also if any be left over they can be returned to the "bugs home" and will carry on. If half a worm be returned it will shortly grow a new head or tail as may be needed.

In most libraries there is a little book by Darwin (not the famous Darwin) on the effects of angle worms on the soil. It is well worth reading.

Yours sincerely
Bill Gianella

With the above addenda to help solve his problem, Captain Morrill's worm collection ought to flourish like mad. Now the only thing left to do is wish him luck with his fishing.

Tight lines, Captain—and thanks, Bill, for the additional expert advice—K.S.W.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

The author of "A Star on Bronze" takes us again to bomb-torn France in the throes of reconstruction to help a young American flier search out the members of the Underground who had succored him in wartime when he had been shot down by the Luftwaffe. In a powerful long novelette

"ONE FOR FRANCE AND ONE FOR ME!"

By GEORGES SURDEZ

—you'll meet Norman Kenton, whose urge to return to Normandy and thank the peasants who had nursed him, fed him, smuggled him back across the Channel to England, boomerangs in as strange a sequence of conflicts as ever befell one man. Why did *Madame*, the keeper of the inn in which he'd been hidden from the Nazi troopers, deny ever having seen him before? Why should *Monsieur Frederic*, the leader of the F.F.I. band which had arranged his escape, now prison him in the same château hideout where he'd been entertained like royalty in '43? And why should the memory of *Emilie*, the girl who'd risked her life to nurse wounded Allied airmen back to health again, now be reviled by all who'd loved her in those blitz days? This stirring tale of post-war Europe is as fine a job as Mr. Surdez has done in many a year.

Hugh Fullerton returns to *Adventure* with "The Peacemaker"—a fine story of Ireland in the days of her brawling kings. . . . William Arthur Breyfogle in "The Shadow of a Mountain" gives us a gripping yarn of Central American rebellion and a duel between men as volcanic as the peaks that tower above them. . . . Stuart Cloete, the distinguished South African novelist, in "A Death in the Family," introduces us to a couple of brothers under the skin who prove that blood is thinner than water . . . Edgar Young, in an unusual article, discourses on that none-such breed of adventurers, the "Typical Tropical Tramps". . . And Alfred Powers ups anchor finally with the Admiral of the Ocean Sea and sails for the New World in the next installment of "Chains for Columbus" . . .

ON SALE DECEMBER 12th

ASK ADVENTURE

Information You Can't Get Elsewhere

MOTORIZED jackrabbits in the jackpines.

Query:-Can you give me any dope on that famous motorcycling event, the "Jack Pines Race," the story behind it, and just what it is? I've got into a little discussion with a buddy who, now that we're out of the foxholes, plans to go partners with me in opening a motorcycle shop, and I'm not sure either of us is quite certain just what we're talking about. Can you send any information along and straighten us both out? Also we understand that Harley and Indian both put out a short course in motorcycle mechanics. What are the requirements and do you have to be an established dealer to take one of the courses?

—Sgt. Alfred Nichols
71st Joint Assault Signal Co.
APO 331 c/o Postmaster
San Francisco, Calif.

Reply by Charles M. Dodge:- I'm not too unfamiliar with what post-foxhole plans and arguments with a sidekick can be like —they called 'em "trenches" in the last fracas (which I personally won with some help from the AEF) and I also did considerable planning and dreaming of what we'd do when we got back. More power to you both, and I'm glad to be of any possible help.

That "Jack Pines" run you mention is one of the toughest in the history of motorcycling. It is almost impossible to describe the miserable going they put the boys through. In the first place it is run off yearly as a national feature and the riders flock to it from all over the country. One of its points of fame always used to be that whereas it was one of the most difficult runs ever conceived, the prizes amount to practically nothing: thus a winner isn't necessarily classed as a professional. But the prestige he enjoys is tremendous, among the rest of the throttle twisters.

There's an old-timer by the name of Ivan Stretten who has won the thing himself several times. He tells me it's one of the trickiest and toughest events he ever saw. And when the going gets bad for Ivan, who has won nearly two thirds of the 1,004 contests he's entered, then the going is really bad business.

They start off together, with not the slightest idea of where they are going, or how they're coming back. They only know it will be a run which "should" take them approximately so many hours—usually twenty-four. It is definitely NOT a speed contest in any way, but one of endurance and riding ability entirely. As a matter of fact, the riders can lose points for hitting a given secret check too soon, as well as too late. They are instructed to hold their speed to a certain average—and from then they're on their own.

In one of the last ones in Michigan, the first man was checked out for Lapeer, a known control some 23 miles away. The rest left at intervals one minute apart and fifteen miles out they ran afoul of the trial riders' worst enemy—the secret check. They don't know when they'll go around a turn and suddenly come upon a bland fellow sitting by the roadside with a stop watch and score pad, checking their numbers and the time they got there. The boys who got there too soon lost several valuable points, of course. At Lapeer a freight train held them up with no way around but to ride the rails, which several of them finally did.

Then the trail markers shot them off the road into wilderness with only a bumpy, snakelike, sandy rut filled with rocks to call a road. This horrible stretch eliminated a few more riders for good. Then they hit a section of sand and woodland trail that was just about impassable. They had to "walk" the machines through it. To make things worse they ran into another secret check with only Ivan and one other fellow on time. Stretten finally won this godawful ordeal with a total of 994 points, having lost only six. He had plowed through tall grass, sand, across brooks and streams, cross-country stretches with no trail or road at all, and you may be sure he was very much all in when he rolled back to the finish line amid several hundred cheering spectators waiting to see which of the road weary cyclers could make it all the way through.

Both Harley and Indian operate a very fine school for motorcycle mechanics in normal times. They are supposed to be for their own dealers, but I'm sure you and your buddy would be more than welcome—especially as you'd be there for the purpose of becoming better prepared for one of their dealerships.

Best of luck!

THE ASK ADVENTURE SERVICE is free, provided self-addressed envelope and FULL POSTAGE for reply are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries must enclose International Reply Coupons, which are exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.

Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to the magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, financial backing or employment.

★*(Enclose addressed envelope with International Reply Coupon.)*

Notice: Many of our *Ask Adventure* experts are still engaged in government service of one kind or another. Some are on active duty in the Army or Navy, others serving in an executive or advisory capacity on various of the boards and offices which were set up to hasten the nation's war effort. Almost without exception these men consented to remain on our staff, carry on their work for the magazine if humanly possible, but with the understanding that for the duration such work was to be of secondary importance to their official duties. This was as it should be, and when you didn't receive answers to queries as promptly as we all wished, your patience was appreciated. Foreign mails are still slow and uncertain, many are still curtailed drastically, but now that the war is over we can hope for a more expanded, smoother functioning *Ask Adventure* service very soon. Bear with us and we'll continue to try to serve you as speedily as possible.

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

SPORTS AND HOBBIES

Archery—EARL B. POWELL, care of *Adventure.*

Baseball—FREDERICK LIEB, care of *Adventure.*

Basketball—STANLEY CARHART, 99 Broad St., Matawan, N. J.

Big Game Hunting in North America: *Guides and equipment*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Boxing—COL. JOHN V. GROMBACH, care of *Adventure.*

Camping—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Canoeing: *Paddling, sailing, cruising, regattas*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 1325 So. Main St., Princeton, Ill.

Coins and Medals—WILLIAM L. CLARK, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th, N. Y. C.

Dogs—FREEMAN LLOYD, care of *Adventure.*

Fencing—COL. JOHN V. GROMBACH, care of *Adventure.*

First Aid—DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure.*

Fishing: *Fresh water; fly and bait casting; bait casting outfits; fishing trips*—JOHN ALDEN KNIGHT, 929 W. 4th St., Williamsport, Penna.

Fishing, Salt water: *Bottom fishing, surf casting; trolling; equipment and locations*—C. BLACKBURN MILLER, care of *Adventure.*

Fly and Bait Casting Tournament—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Health-Building Activities, Hiking — DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure.*

Motor Boating—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motorcycling: *Regulations, mechanics, racing*—CHARLES M. DODGE, care of *Adventure.*

Mountain Climbing—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 6520 Romaine St., Hollywood, Calif.

Old Songs—ROBERT WHITE, 913 W. 7th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: *Foreign and American*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, 170 Liberty Rd., Salem, Oregon.

Shotguns, American and Foreign: Wing Shooting and Field Trials—ROY S. TINNEY, Chatham, New Jersey.

Small Boating: *Skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y., N. Y.

Swords, Spears, Pole Arms and Armor—MAJOR R. E. GARDNER, care of *Adventure.*

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, R. D. No. 1, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—MURL E. THRUSH, New York Athletic Club, 59th St. and 7th Ave., N. Y., N. Y.

Yachting—A. R. KNAUER, 6720 Jeffery Ave., Chicago, Ill.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American, north of the Panama Canal, customs, dress, architecture; pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Entomology: *Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Penna.

Forestry, North American: *The U. S. Forestry Service, our national forests, conservation and use*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Forestry, Tropical: *Tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, care of U. S. Forest Service, Glenn Bldg., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: *Reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, care of *Adventure.*

Mining, Prospecting, and Precious Stones: *Anywhere in North America. Outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—VICTOR SHAW, care of *Adventure.*

Ornithology: *Birds; their habits and distribution*—DAVIS QUINN, 5 Minerva Pl., Bronx, N. Y.

Photography: *Outfitting, work in out-of-the way places; general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Radio: *Telegraphy, telephony, history, receiver construction, portable sets*—DONALD MCNICOL, care of *Adventure.*

Railroads: *In the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure.*

Sunken Treasure: Treasure ships; deep-sea diving; *salvage operations and equipment*—LIEUTENANT HARRY E. RIESEBERG, care of *Adventure.*

Taxidermy—EDWARD B. LANG, 156 Joralemon St., Belleville, N. J.

Wildcrafting and Trapping—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE

Federal Investigation Activities: *Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of *Adventure.*

The Merchant Marine—GORDON MACALLISTER, care of *Adventure.*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police—ALEC CAVADAS, King Edward High School, Vancouver, B. C.

State Police—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of *Adventure.*

U. S. Marine Corps—LIEUT. COL. F. W. HOPKINS, care of *Adventure.*

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

Philippine Islands—BUCK CONNER, Conner Field, Quartzsite, Ariz.

★New Guinea—L. P. B. ARMIT, care of *Adventure.*

★New Zealand, Cook Island, Samoa—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★Australia and Tasmania—ALAN FOLEY, 243 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia.

★South Sea Islands—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, No. 1 Flat "Scarborough," 83 Sidney Rd., Manley N. S. W., Australia.

Madagascar—RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, N. Y., N. Y.

Africa, Part 1 ★*Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*—CAPT. H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. **2** Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya—GORDON MACGREAGH, 2231 W. Harbor Drive, St. Petersburg, Florida. **3** *Tripoli, Sahara caravans* — CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure.* **4** *Bechuanaland, Southwest Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa*—MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, care of *Adventure.* **5** ★*Cape Province, Orange Free State, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal, Rhodesia*—PETER FRANKLIN, Box 1491, Durban, Natal, So. Africa.

Asia, Part 1 ★*Siam, Malay States, Straits, Settlements, Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies, Ceylon*—V. B. WINDEL, care of *Adventure.* **4** *Persia, Arabia*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure.* **5** ★*Palestine*—CAPTAIN H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C.

Europe, Part 1—*Denmark, Germany, Scandinavia*—G. I. COLBRON, care of *Adventure.*

Central America—ROBERT SPIERS: BENJAMIN, care of *Adventure.*

South America, Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile*—EDGAR YOUNG, care of *Adventure.*

★West Indies—JOHN B. LEFFINGWELL, Box 1333, Nueva Gerona, Isle of Pines, Cuba.

Iceland—G. I. COLBRON, care of *Adventure.*

Baffinland and Greenland—VICTOR SHAW, care of *Adventure.*

Labrador—WILMOT T. DEBELL, care of *Adventure.*

Mexico, Part 1 *Northern Border States*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex. **2** *Quintana Roo, Yucatan Campeche*—CAPTAIN W. RUSSELL SHEETS, care of *Adventure.*

Canada, Part 1 ★*Southeastern Quebec*—WILLIAM MACMILLAN, 89 Laurentide Ave., Quebec, Canada. **3** *Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario*—HARRY M. MOORE, *The Courier Advocate,* Trenton Ont., Canada. **4** ★*Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario, National Parks Camping*—A. D. L. ROBINSON, 103 Wembly Rd. (Forest Hill), Toronto, Onto., Canada. **5** ★*Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta*—C. PLOWDEN, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C. **6** ★*Northern Saskatchewan; Indian life and language, hunting, trapping*—H. S. M. KEMP, 501—10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask.

Alaska—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 6520 Romaine St., Hollywood, Calif.

Western U. S., Part 1 *Pacific Coast States*—FRANK WINCH, care of *Adventure.* **3** *New Mexico; Indians, etc.*—H. F. ROBINSON, 459 Towner Ave., Albuquerque, N. M. **4** *Nevada, Montana and Northern Rockies*—FRED W. EGELSTON, Elks' Home, Elko, Nev. **5** *Idaho and environs*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill. **6** *Arizona, Utah*—C. C. ANDERSON, Holbrook Tribune-News, Holbrook, Arizona. **7** *Texas, Oklahoma*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Middle Western U. S., Part 2 *Ohio River and Tributaries and Mississippi River*—GEO. A. ZERR, 31 Cannon St., Pittsburgh, 5, Penna. **3** *Lower Mississippi from St. Louis down, Louisiana swamps, St. Francis. Arkansas Bottom*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S., Part 1 *Maine*—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me. **2** *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, 40 Chapel St., Woodmont, Conn. **3** *Adirondacks, New York*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif. **5** *Ala., Tenn., Miss., N. C.; S. C., Fla., Ga.*—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure.* **6** *The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountains south of Virginia*—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

(Continued from page 133)

"Francisco, what is it you are saying? All that matters is the price and the quality. Ours is unexcelled. Our charcoal in particular is superior to any other, made by our expert."

"Yes, Señor Cruz, made by one you are constantly rebuking, constantly threatening to dismiss. No, Señor Cruz, when two kegs of gunpowder are of equal quality, we will take the one that is made under the best working conditions. The men do not line up ahead of time at Seville. We cannot buy your gunpowder."

"If I give my word the lining-up will stop?"

"And Felipe?"

"The scolding will cease."

"In that case we are in the market for five hundred kegs. But we do not want it ready-mixed. We will mix it as we use it. So we will require three hundred and fifty kegs of saltpeter, seventy-five kegs of charcoal, and seventy-five kegs of sulphur. Mark the heads of the kegs for easy identification—'s' for saltpeter, 'c' for charcoal, 'su' for sulphur.

Of Columbus' four voyages, it was easy to secure seamen for only one. Everybody clamored for places on the second voyage Men virtually had to be drafted for all the others. This fourth one was the hardest to get crews for except the first. The four caravels required a hundred and forty sailors, and for weeks it looked as though we couldn't find enough.

"I want to go," declared Emilio, when he kept his appointment with me on Thursday.

"You Emilio? I always thought you did not want to do anything but make gunpowder and serve Señor Cruz, because of the way you were always first outside the door and all."

"It was for my mother. I hated it. What I really wanted was travel, adventure, excitement. I stayed here at Cadiz and made gunpowder for her sake. I forced myself to stand it when she was alive. I can't now. So take me, Francisco, as a common sailor."

"I will ask Pico. We may need a helper."

"Yes," agreed Pico, "I ought to have a second-assistant cannoneer."

Soon afterwards, without our recommendation, another man was chosen as a member of the crew of Columbus' own flagship, the *Capitana*. He had been accepted by Columbus during my absence and Pico's. Five others had signed up at the same time. In his urgent need, Columbus felt it was a grand day's work to get a whole half-dozen of such able-bodied men. This one put down the name of Carlos Robles. Three or four days later, when I was with Columbus in the admiral's room on the *Capitana*, he entered in connection with some duty or other and bowed respectfully. Then, straightening up, he saw me and his face went white.

It was Zorilla—the Cadiz torturer!

(End of Part II)

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to *Lost Trails* will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and concerning women are declined, as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or that may not seem suitable to the editors for any other reason. No charge is made for publication of notices.

Charles Edward Fetter, born at Dennison, Ohio, age 36, height 6 ft., weight 170 lbs., blond hair. Last heard of in or around Toronto, Can. Any information will be appreciated by his brother James P. Fetter, Comm. Spec. N. A. S. No. 28, Fleet Post Office, San Francisco, Calif.

Can anyone help me find the whereabouts of my brother-in-law, William Henry Roberts. I last heard from him in 1920, from New York City. He is a veteran of World War I, in which he fought with the Canadian Army. He is about six feet tall, and has gray eyes, and probably gray hair. He was born in Wales, and reared in England. If anyone can help, please address Raymond S. Willard at: 1565 Airline Avenue, Toledo, 9, Ohio.

Corp. J. W. "Red" Egan, 386436 USMCR, Barracks 14-B-4. Receiving Co., Staging Reg., Camp Pendleton, Oceanside, Calif. would like to hear from any of his old buddies from the 349th Platoon, USMCR who trained with him at San Diego in April-May-June 1942.

Francis E. Northrope, Monico, Wisconsin wishes information about his brother Melvin H. Northrope, last heard of driving a bus out of Hastings, Neb. He served four years in Canadian Army and is twenty-four years old, 5 ft. 6 in. tall, weighs 100-110 lbs., blue eyes, ruddy complexion, dark brown hair. His brother is too young to handle horses and needs help running the farm.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Wilfred E. Schmaultz, born and raised in Chicago, Ill., last heard of residing at 84 Jackson St., San Francisco, Calif., please notify M. H. House, Box M, c/o Atlantic Refining Co., Meeteetse, Wyoming. He probably shipped in the Merchant Marine in Oct. '44.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of John Andrew Lannan born at Summerville, P.E.I., last heard of at City Island, New York about fifteen years ago, was then engaged in ship building business and is believed to have moved to the State of Connecticut. Age about 64 years. Please communicate with his sister, Mrs. Hugh D. McClelland, St. Peter's Bay, Prince Edward Island.

(Continued from page 53)

of despair when Cluff breezed into the office.

"When do I go?" asked the Field Marshal, standing there chunky and slightly frayed at the seams, a look of disdain on his square face.

I shook hands with him. "Any minute now," I said, and read the letter which restored him to flight status. "I'm just having some chintz curtains hung in Number fifty-one. Make it more homelike."

"Don't get smart, feather merchant," he snarled. "You're talking to a man with eight thousand hours. Never forget that." He was looking around the office with his lip curled. His eyes were thoughtful.

"And I ain't payin' any American income tax, either," he announced belligerently.

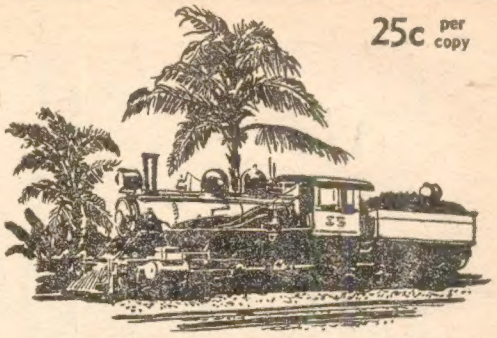
Since I had not discussed the matter with him, one way or the other, I was mildly surprised. But, in the name of Morgenthau, I absolved him of all tax and he swaggered out carrying his log book. The Chinese crew was tagging along in back of him, the wondrously clean cap was askew on his head, and he was whistling, far off key. He was almost to the taxi strip when I shouted that he had not filled out a weather clearance. He turned to stare, looking more than ever like Eric Blore's idiot son, and bellowed that he didn't give a damn what the weather was, he was going anyway. Then he turned and continued toward the plane. I shook my head and went back in the office.

FOUR hours later, they woke me up and showed me his message. I folded the mosquito net back groggily, and looked at the little slip. It was to me, and said not to worry, that he had plenty of gas. Wearily, I climbed out, thinking that we had been through this so many times before. When I called the field, they said yes, Cluff in 51 was overdue. I went out and we sat there in the little office sweating him out.

Four more hours went by without any word, and the big wall clock dotted the seconds, like drops of sound falling into the silence, ticking away toward the moment when he would be out of gasoline.

As always, I was juggling the thing in my head. A Douglas C-53 carries 820 gallons of gasoline, over eleven hours' flying time if the pilot conserves it by his power setting and mixture. The radio receivers crackled from time to time, and the teletype bell kept exploding in the quiet room, but it was all routine. Kunming needed five cylinders of oxygen. That was no surprise—they always did. Likiang wanted three drums of motor spirits parachuted to the radio station.

"Very soon off air if not," said the message, with what I thought was restraint and conclusiveness. Doctor Hsu, in Suifu, had an epidemic



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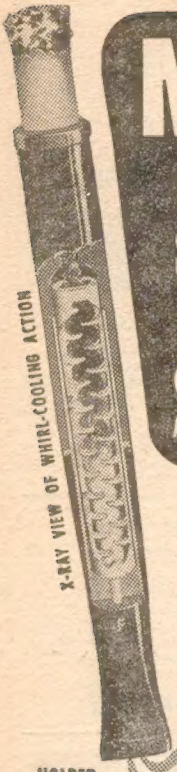

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on his hands, and the children needed serum for it. That, too, was common enough. There were epidemics all over China, but a plane couldn't land at Suifu at night. There were no runway lights there, not even smudge pots, and the mountains on that route were over 20,000 feet high. I made a note for the dawn flight to take the serum, and we waited for news of Cluff.

Nothing from the Field Marshal. Just before dawn, I drove back out to the pilots' bungalow. There was no use in waiting, because he was down somewhere. The first grayness was breaking over the tea gardens of Assam, and the early morning wind was cool on my face. I figured that the Field Marshal, finally, was on a peak somewhere.

Just before noon, they shook me again. Cluff had crashed just outside Ipin, but all hands were safe. The plane was a washout. Fitful sleep had not drawn the tension out of me, and I began to laugh helplessly. I stood under the tepid shower and then got dressed, reflecting that this would really wash the Field Marshal up with the front office. While I was eating breakfast, Georgia Bill Robertson sat across from me and elaborated on the same theme. He added, however, that Cluff was now a full-fledged ace, with five planes to his credit. All of them were American, of course, but he had demolished five.

That's the end of the story about how the Field Marshal got to be an ace. No, they didn't fire him. Instead they raised his base pay. You ought to know these things, if you can read, because every press service in the world carried the story—with the pictures of Chiang hanging the highest Chinese air decoration, The Order of The Cloud, around Cluff's neck.

I was in the picture, too. I was the dyspeptic-looking character on the far right side. It is not a good picture of me.

Because Ipin is Suifu. Same town. The one where all the kids needed the meningococci serum. One of our principal cargoes, outside of ammunition and gasoline, is drugs, and Cluff happened to have them aboard. Sulfas and the rest, including this serum they needed. It is disgusting in a way, and absolutely understandable in another. A camp-town preacher could give you chapter and verse on it, I imagine. Anyway, we're still flying the Hump and the Field Marshal is damn-nigh insufferable. His is the plane with the five neat American flags on the fuselage, as befits an ace. No, he hasn't any more to his credit yet, unless you count the railroad train he hit on the north taxi strip the other day. He only lost a wing on that one, anyway. So far, he has not even claimed the train as a probable, and I was beginning to feel quite proud of him. The other day, however, I caught him sketching smokestacks.

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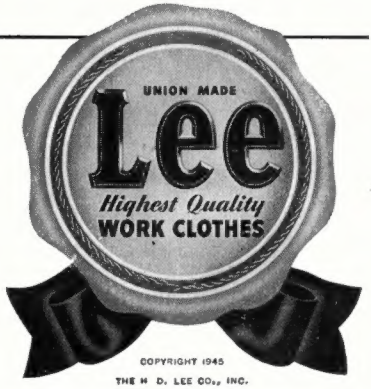

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